A FOOLISH MARRIAGE:

AN EDINBURGH STORY OF STUDENT LIFE.

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"HE FLANG A BOOK AT MY HEID, BUT I DODGED IT" (*p.* 44).

A FOOLISH MARRIAGE:

AN EDINBURGH STORY OF STUDENT LIFE.

BY

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A FOOLISH MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER I.

KINSWOMEN.

IN the spacious drawing-room of a West-End Glasgow mansion, two women were together on the afternoon of a grey and chill October day. In the city the fog hung dense and low, but the air of the West End was clearer, though the sky looked dark and threatening. The leaves were all off the trees in parks and gardens, and the two tall beeches which guarded the entrance to the house, as well as gave it its name, stretched out their gaunt arms, and seemed to shiver as the bitter wind swept through them. The drawing-room of Beechholm was a luxurious and comfortable apartment. The fire blazed ruddily in the handsome grate, and cast a pleasant glow upon the elegant appointments with which wealth and taste had beautified the place. The occupants, aunt and niece, wore deep mourning, and bore traces of trouble and sorrow in their faces.

Beyond that, however, there was no sort of resemblance between them. The elder of the two was a woman past middle life, a gaunt, large-featured, homely woman, who looked as if she had done fierce battle with the world. She had neither that complacent, restful look nor that repose of manner which mark those whose lives have fallen in pleasant places, and to whom life is a thing of ease and beauty. Her face bore traces of the sordid care which had pursued her for many years, and her hands the marks of the toil which was her daily portion. Yet the face was a good one, denoting strength of character, and even a latent sweetness of nature, which, in happier circumstances, would have been a blessing to herself and others. She had just relieved herself of a speech which appeared to her niece both hard and unjustifiable, who had sprung up from her seat, unable longer to keep still.

"You have no right to speak so of papa, Aunt Euphame," she passionately cried. "Oh! whatever the world may think or say of him now, he *was* a good man. I wish God would only take me away. I have nothing left to live for now."

"That is but foolish talk," was the grim retort. "And if you think it becomes a young woman to use her Maker's name in that way, ye are mistaken. But what could be expected from your upbringing? Lassie, ye are to be pitied."

The last words were the truest which had yet fallen from Miss Euphame's lips, but

there was not much accompanying compassion in the straight, cold look of her keen small eyes as they dwelt with unpromising severity on the young woman restlessly walking up and down the room before her. Magdalen Grey made no response to her aunt's last words, but continued her slow pacing to and fro, with her eyes fixed upon the floor. Once or twice a curious trembling was visible about her mouth. It did not indicate grief, however, but rather a kind of subdued passion of anger to which she either feared, or did not wish, to give expression. She was a well-made, graceful young woman, with a strong, good face, a large, firm, but sweet mouth, and clear, intelligent grey eyes. Not a beautiful young woman at all, but there was something self-reliant and resolute and suggestive about her. She looked as if she could do battle with the world if need be. And her time had come.

"Yes, you are to be pitied," continued Miss Euphame, calmly. "But dinna ye think it comes hard on me to have my faith in my only brother shattered like this? Wha would hae thocht Alexander Grey would leave a dishonoured memory?"

"Aunt Euphame, if you go on speaking like that I shall leave the room!"

Magdalen flung up her head, and her fine eyes blazed upon her aunt in righteous anger.

"He did not injure you. Leave recrimination to others, and let me, at least, cherish his memory. Never while I live shall I think of it but with reverent and adoring love; never while I live!"

A round red spot leaped suddenly into Miss Euphame's withered cheeks, and she gave her hands a curious slap together.

"I must say, Magdalen, that for one in your circumstances you are very high-handed," she said, tartly. "The fall hasna broken your pride; maybe ye havena come down far enough."

"Maybe not," Magdalen answered, under her breath.

"Well, there's no use wasting my time in useless talk," continued Miss Euphame, with asperity, and ignoring the fact that she had led off the useless talk. "I'm here to act, if necessary. What are you going to do with yourself?"

"I don't know."

"As ye are penniless, and waur, for I dinna suppose the very clothes you stand in are paid for, ye havena mony ways o't to choose. Have ye thocht what you are to do for a livin'?"

It was some minutes before the girl replied to this practical question.

"I have thought about it in a way," she said at length, slowly, and with a measured accent. "There is nothing I am fit for except domestic service. I have no accomplishments. There has been a great deal of money—yes, I know what you would say, other people's money—spent upon me. But I have neither gifts nor graces, only a strong body and a pair of capable hands."

She stretched them out as she spoke—white, soft, beautiful hands, which, though large, were exquisitely shaped, and had

never been soiled or blemished by any menial work. Miss Euphame glanced from them to her own withered, hardened palms, which were familiar with the meanest items of household drudgery, and a curious smile came upon her lips. The word smile, however, suggests something pleasant, and there was nothing pleasant in that parting of the spinster's lips. It was more like a grin.

"I know what you are thinking, Aunt Euphame," the girl put in, quietly. "Well, it will be a pity to spoil them. They have been admired before now, but they shall acquire a reputation for capable work before I have done with them."

"And have you made up your mind to domestic service?"

"I have."

"To go out as housemaid, and to wear the livery. How will ye like to see yourself in cap and apron, saying, 'Yes, sir,' and 'Yes, ma'am,' to folks you don't consider half as good's yourself?"

"I'll do it, Aunt Euphame. I shall at least know my place, and keep it. I have seen enough of the upper grades of servitude to know I couldn't have self-control for them."

"Very well, then; you'd better come back to Edinburgh with me."

"In what capacity?"

"To do what you're bid," Miss Euphame answered, calmly. "There's enough to do, I can tell ye. I've three lodgers, an' I'm failin'. But I canna afford another servant, an' the one I hae is no worth her meat."

"Are the lodgers gentlemen?"

"They're students," answered Miss Euphame, and Magdalen smiled suddenly; though her aunt was quite unconscious that she had been guilty of a fine sarcasm. "Medical students, an' respectable for students. They give little trouble, an' I'm very weel aff wi' them."

"Very well, Aunt Euphame, I'll come."

"But I canna gie ye a wage, Magdalen," said the old lady, and the wrinkles on her brow deepened as she entered upon business themes. "Ye see I'll need to keep Katie on for the stair an' the bell an' the errands. But you'll get what you need."

"I believe that, Aunt Euphame. You won't find me grasping, I promise you, and I'll do my best."

"You'll find the young men very pleasant spoken, especially Mr. Stormont; he plays for ever on the fiddle, an' torments the life oot o' the ither ane. *He's* a student, if ye like—books for ever. I wonder he has an e'e in his heid. His father's a doctor in the Sooth, but——"

"I don't feel deeply interested in them, Aunt Euphame," interrupted Magdalen. "It can't matter to me whether they are pleasant spoken or otherwise, for, of course, they won't speak to *me*."

Miss Euphame looked disconcerted. She was quite mistaken in her brother's daughter, though she was rather given to boasting of her knowledge of human nature. She felt vaguely uncomfortable at the very thought of having her as an inmate of her house. She tried to picture Magdalen going in and

out of the students' rooms with her head in the air, and that terrible proud curl on her lips. Perhaps in the end it would not pay.

"Well, well! We can give it a trial, anyway," she said, answering herself, rather than Magdalen. "If you are anxious to do your duty, and to be comfortable, I daresay we'll do well enough, and it will certainly be better than serving strange folk."

"We'll hope so—we'll give it a fair trial," Magdalen said; and, as if to signify that the matter was definitely settled, walked out of the room.

When she had closed the door, she stood for a moment on the carpeted landing and looked down the staircase towards the glass door which opened off the wide hall into the outer lobby. She could see beyond the flight of steps and the gravelled path before the doors the green smooth turf on the little lawn, and the wintry sunbeams kissing the pale lips of some late daisies not yet nipped by the early frosts. A strange, uncertain smile, not unlike those wan sunbeams, flitted drearily across her face, and she turned away swiftly, and opening a door at the other side of the landing, entered the guest chamber of the house and turned the key within. It was in semi-darkness. Not twenty-four hours ago the master of the house had been carried across the threshold to his grave. It was a spacious and handsome room, well furnished, and in good taste—such a room as we see in the house of a wealthy man. Until the crash came Alexander Grey had been regarded as wealthy, and had been admired

and looked up to as a shining example of the self-made man.

This fine mansion, built to his own design in the most fashionable suburb of the western metropolis, was pointed out as a monument to native ability and indomitable perseverance. For many long years Alexander Grey's name was above suspicion, and he walked among his fellow-men honoured and beloved.

But he was a fraud after all; so the world said now, judging harshly; an unscrupulous speculator, who, when exposure became inevitable, died by his own hand rather than face the obloquy he deserved.

That was all the world now cared to know of Alexander Grey. There remained a few kind souls who pitied his only child, but the majority had a stone to throw at her in passing, too, recalling, or imagining, her pride and her vain-gloriousness in the days of her success—two attributes absolutely foreign to the nature of Magdalen Grey. She had accepted the good lavished on her by an indulgent father, and enjoyed it after the fashion of youth, to whom beautiful and luxurious things are desirable and pleasant; but in the midst of it all she had preserved a simplicity of character and a humbleness of mind for which none gave her credit. The events which had recently transpired had given her an awful shock—how awful she scarcely realised herself. But it was beginning to dawn upon her that a great and terrible change had come over the spirit of her dream. She sat down in the quiet room, where so lately the dead had been, and laid

ner cheek upon the pillow her father's unconscious head had so lately pressed, and in that dreary and awesome stillness bade good-bye to all that had been bright, and sweet, and precious in life, not knowing that she had with her lips only touched the goblet at the brim.

CHAPTER II.

FACING IT.

SHE was not long allowed the luxury of quiet thought. In less than half an hour there was a knock at the door, and the housemaid's voice spoke to her somewhat deprecatingly.

"Please, ma'am, Miss Grey is getting very impatient. Tea has been taken into the drawing-room, and she wants to know what you are going to do?"

Such was the message Miss Euphame had sent to her niece.

Magdalen rose at once, recalled again to the material side of things, to the sad and stern reality of life.

"All right, Anne, I shall be down persently," she answered quietly, and almost immediately opened the door to find the girl still standing with a wistfulness in her kind eyes which Magdalen found it best not to notice. She was painfully sensitive to kindness, and in her present desolate mood it touched her to the quick.

"What is it, Anne?" she asked, but averting her head slightly to hide her own sad lack of composure.

"Oh, ma'am, would you please to tell me, is the trouble so great as they say?" asked the girl, almost imploringly. "Don't send me away, Miss Magdalen. I'd willingly serve you anywhere, and for nothing if need be, only don't send me away."

Magdalen burst into tears, and for a moment allowed her proud head to rest on the girl's faithful shoulder.

"Oh, Anne, Anne, the trouble is so bad that it can't possibly be any worse. Thank you for what you say. You have been kinder to me than anybody else has been But it is impossible that I can keep you. I shall have to work myself, Anne, a great deal harder than you have had to do in this house; but I thank you all the same."

"I wouldn't mind how small the place, and I don't eat much. I'd keep everything so nice for you," pleaded the girl, with all her heart in her eyes. She was of English parentage, and had been left an orphan alone in Glasgow; in which city she had never had a home till Miss Grey took her into her service. Though Magdalen had long prized her as a faithful and capable servant, she had till now had no idea of the love with which she had inspired the girl's heart. It was a revelation to her, and a comfort also in that hour of bitter need.

"It is impossible I can keep you, Anne," she repeated, sadly; "but I shall never forget your kindness. We shall have another talk over it again, and if I can do anything to get you a good place, you know I will. Meanwhile, I must go to my aunt."

She wrung the girl's hand and glided along the corridor to the drawing-room door. Within, Miss Euphame sat very bolt upr[illegible] on one of the Chippendale chairs, lo[illegible]g quite out of her element. She was not used to afternoon tea in such a luxurious place, and she showed it in every gesture and look.

"You call this tea!" she said, with a sniff of scornful disapproval. "There's no enough to feed a sparrow. Did that fine young woman take my message to ye, Magdalen, an' if she did condescend, what have ye to say? I must go back to Edinburgh to-night, or at the latest the morn's morning. Were you in earnest when ye said ye were comin' wi' me?"

"I was. I'll make a trial of the situation, Aunt Euphame," said Magdalen, calmly. "If you will put up with my inexperience, I'll do my best, and if we don't suit each other I can look out for something else."

"I'm no very sure," said Miss Euphame, looking at her niece with discouraging criticism. "It'll be the wonder o' Keir Street."

"What?" asked Magdalen, absently thinking of something else. She was indeed thinking, as she glanced round the pretty room, where she had spent so many happy hours, that there was nothing among all the beautiful things in which she had taken such delight upon which she could lay her hands and say it was hers, not even a trifle she dared remove to cherish as a memento of the days that were not. Honour and honesty alike demanded that everything should be left.

It belonged by right to the many who had suffered in the crash. Oh, it was a bitter thought.

"Isn't it a very dingy street, Aunt Euphame?" she asked, rather indifferently. "I remember it rained the only time I was there, and I thought it looked awful. I was depressed, I remember, seeing the Infirmary as we drove along. Such a great place, and so suggestive of misery and suffering."

"You are ower easy depressed," said Miss Euphame, grimly. "It hasna that effect on my students, as ye'll sune find oot; in fact, it mak's them lively. They hae the fiddle, an' the banes o' a man's airm lyin' on the table, whiles mixed up among their meat, Katie says. Oh, they'll sune cure ye o' your niceness."

Magdalen could not refrain from smiling as this picture was vividly placed before her imagination.

"I suppose it is possible to get used to anything, Aunt Euphame," she said, gravely. "I don't suppose they associate the things with human beings at all."

"Faith, they're a queer lot," said Aunt Euphame, nothing loth to hold forth on the theme, naturally more interesting to her than any other in the world. "Stormont an' Gilruth are not bad for their kind; naebody expects a student to be douce, or specially well behaved. But Brebner, him that's in the back-parlour, he's past speakin' o'; but he's English."

It would be quite impossible to convey in words the sovereign contempt with which

Miss Euphame uttered the last word. Again Magdalen smiled, and brushing the crumbs off her black gown, looked at her aunt even with a gleam of amusement in her eye. She was not without a keen sense of humour, and the spinster's oddly expressed views of the students struck her as inexpressibly ludicrous.

"I suppose that accounts for everything; but why is he past speaking about? Does he drink?"

"Ay, like a fish, an' comes in at twa an' three in the mornin,' rousin' the hale stai Oh, he's an ill loon, an' yet there's something nice aboot the crater too. Mony's the day I've gane up to gie him notice, an' cam' doon laughin' at his nonsense; an' he pays up like a prince when he has it; though I've seen him rin on for a month. It's no the warst kind that drinks, my woman, ye'll find oot that. Well, can ye gang back to Edinburgh wi' me the nicht?"

"I might, aunt! Oh, I hardly think that —indeed, it is impossible. How can I leave the servants here alone?"

Aunt Euphame sniffed.

"The servants, my woman, 'll hae to be paid off. Why no give them their wages an' let them away? Mr. Fothergill, the lawyer, is comin' roond the night, an' can settle up everything."

Magdalen looked out of the window on the misty landscape and pondered the thing in her mind. It was all over, indeed, and what was to be gained by lingering in that desolate and dishonoured house?

Suddenly Miss Euphame leaned forward n her chair with a more than ordinary keenness in her eye.

"Then, ye think, Magdalen, that your grandfather will do nothing for ye?"

"I am sure of it," replied Magdalen, coldly.

"But hae ye asked him?"

"Indeed, no. His demeanour to me yesterday was cruel. Oh, it was shameful; he need not have forgotten how kind and loving papa was always to mamma. Oh, he thinks of nothing but his own respectability, and of the blow to his pride."

"Still," said Miss Euphame, slowly, "he's your mother's father, an' he has gear. Sometimes, my woman, ye have to put your pride in your pocket in this world—an' maybe your time has come. He's an auld man, an' he has a fine house in Blythswood Square. What's to hinder him from takin' you there? It would be liker the thing than comin' to Keir Street, onywey."

"I'd rather come with you, Aunt Euphame, but if you will not have me, I must think of something else," said Magdalen, with a touch of extreme bitterness.

"Oh, I want ye weel enough; that is, I'll dae what I can for ye. Maybe my tongue is sharp, but I'm no that ill at the bottom, and what I say I'll dae. Only, Magdalen, I maun hae my say, and ain brither though your father was to me I canna say he treated me well in his lifetime, or that he was an upright man. I'd rather be fechtin' on as I am, wi' the loons o' laddies—payin' my way as best I can. It's an honest livin', anyhoo."

It was a sore subject, and Magdalen, conscious of the rugged kindness which really underlay the old woman's gruff exterior, tried to bear these reflections with more fortitude than an hour ago. It was not to be supposed, after all, that anybody could know her father as she knew him. Aunt Euphame but judged after the fashion of the world.

"Do you think grandfather would give me something out of this house if I asked him, aunt?" she asked, with a touch of wistfulness, to which the old lady was by no means insensible.

"What's that?"

"The portrait of papa in the dining-room. Lavery painted it, and it cost a hundred and fifty pounds. It is the only thing in this house I covet."

"You might ask him," suggested Miss Euphame. "Tak' my advice, an' gang oot to the Square to-night."

Miss Euphame had not the smallest hope that old Mr. Spence would grant any such request; but there was just the chance that the sight of Magdalen in her desolate grief might soften him. In spite of her eccentricities, Miss Euphame had a fine sense of the fitness of things, and as she watched the slender figure of her niece pacing to and fro the room, and noted the air of ladyhood, the unconscious touch of hauteur in her bearing, she felt how utterly out of place she would be in the dingy lodging-house in Keir Street; and that everything else must be tried before it came to that.

"Well, Aunt Euphame, if you'll wait till to-morrow morning, I'll go out to grandfather's to-night after Mr. Fothergill has been here," said Magdalen. "I want to ask him one or two things; and it is not likely when I am in Edinburgh I shall have a chance again for a long time."

CHAPTER III.

PURSEPROUD.

MR. JAMES SPENCE, head of the firm of Spence & Co., engineers, was smoking his after-dinner pipe in the dining-room of his house in Blythswood Square, when he was informed that a young lady wished to see him—a young lady giving the name of Miss Grey. The maid who delivered the name had only been in Mr. Spence's service for three days, and therefore knew nothing about recent events. The old gentleman, a person of thin, spare figure, and sharp, even attenuated, features, looked a trifle surprised when he heard who wanted to see him, but desired that she should immediately be shown into his presence. He stood up to receive her, looking very grim and unpromising. A stouter heart than Magdalen's might have quailed under that piercing gaze, and given up hope at sight of the expression in his face. A hard man—a very hard man, indeed—was Mr. James Spence; one to whom sympathy was an unknown quality, and feeling of any kind, beyond what

immediately affected his own selfish interests, a very rare experience.

"Good evening, grandfather. I have interrupted you at dinner, I am afraid," said Magdalen, in quiet apology. "Perhaps I ought to have asked first whether you were willing to receive me."

"Of course I am quite willing, and I have dined, thank you, as I presume you have," he said, coldly and formally. "Pray sit down. I hope I see you well?"

He looked at her keenly and critically, secretly admiring her fine appearance, and at the same time seeking to learn from her countenance what was the nature of her errand. She did not look like one who had come to crave charity; and yet for what other purpose could a penniless girl desire to see him? There had never been much intimacy between the house in Great Western Road and the one in Blythswood Square. Mr. Spence, hard-fisted, saving, parsimonious, could not expect to have much in common with his extravagant and lavish son-in-law.

"I am quite well, thank you, grandfather," said Magdalen, as she removed her veil, the room being warm, and she heated with the short walk from the car line to the Square. "I thought, perhaps, you would have come to see me before now; and as I am going away to-morrow I thought I had better come to-night."

The old gentleman looked at once relieved and surprised.

"Going away to-morrow—where, may I ask?"

"To Edinburgh, with my Aunt Euphame," Magdalen responded, and there was a moment's awkward silence.

"I—I thought that good lady was in rather reduced circumstances?" Mr. Spence ventured to remark.

"She is very poor," replied Magdalen, calmly. "She makes her livelihood keeping lodgers. She is kind enough to offer me a home in return for any assistance I can give her."

She leaned back in her chair as she spoke, folded her white, bare hands on her knee, and looked calmly into her grandfather's face. Something in that steady look disconcerted him slightly, and caused him to turn his back and take a mouthful of whiskey and water from his tumbler. Whiskey and water was Mr. Spence's favourite beverage, in which, however, he indulged himself very sparingly. The old gentleman, indeed, was lavish with nothing but advice, which cost him nothing.

"It will be a change for you, Magdalen; but necessity knows no law," he remarked irrelevantly. "To-morrow do you go?—and is the house to be shut up?"

"I suppose so. The servants leave to-morrow, and Mr. Fothergill makes all other arrangements, I have no concern with it now, of course. The house and all it contains belongs to them." She spoke without bitterness, and very calmly; but the old gentleman felt that there was more below that calm exterior than was revealed to the casual eye.

"It is very lamentable that it should be so," he said, in his precise way. "I am very sorry for you, but the laws of the universe are unalterable, and suffering must follow sin. Also, the innocent must bear the burden with the guilty. But I have no doubt you will be happy with your aunt, who is a very estimable person."

Magdalen's lip curled.

"She has a kind heart, though her tongue is sharp," she said, a trifle wearily, and glanced round the large room, noting its shabbiness and its pretentiousness, and thinking how well its occupants accorded with it. She could have laughed aloud at the very thought of asking the grim, miserly old man to redeem for her the painting she coveted, and she wondered that she had been so foolish as to entertain it for a moment.

"Was papa, then, so very guilty?" she asked suddenly, bringing her large eyes with a direct and peculiar flash back to her grandfather's face. "People talk, but no one has ever told me the real state of affairs. Please to tell me."

The slow, red colour mounted in the old gentleman's wrinkled cheeks, and he contracted his dusky white eyebrows till they met together.

"It was fraudulent bankruptcy, girl; and had he lived he would have had to expiate his guilt in a felon's cell. There has been no more disgraceful thing in Glasgow since the Bailey Brothers' case, twenty years ago."

"He may not have been entirely to blame," put in Magdalen, her colour rising also.

"Not entirely, perhaps; his partner must have been to a certain extent cognisant. But where he was entirely to blame was living in such unbounded luxury; lacking for nothing; eating and drinking and wearing of the best at other folks' expense; and then the exposure, which has to come sooner or later. But had he not been such a fool he might have averted it till the crisis was past."

"I shall never believe that papa did wrong willingly," said Magdalen, passionately.

"A very natural and creditable sentiment for you to entertain; but the manner of his death, was it not a tacit acknowledgment of his guilt? What a scandal it has been!—I shall never recover it; and you cannot expect me to have much respect for his memory. When some things are stripped of false sentiment, they look very ugly, Magdalen. This is one of them. My advice to you is to do your best in the sphere you are now called to, and try and forget that you ever had a father."

"His memory is all that is left to me," she answered, with a nervous movement of her hands, and a slight tremulousness in her voice. "It will never cease to be my dearest possession. I had better go away now, grandfather, before we quarrel."

"I never quarrel with people; it doesn't pay," was the dry response. "I suppose you came here expecting to get something, didn't you?"

"I came to ask you something, certainly;

not money, grandpapa--so you need not take out your purse."

She rose to her feet, and tied her veil again over her now white face. The interview had tried her sorely; and she felt, if that were possible, a degree more desolate than when she entered that pretentious abode.

"What was it? Anything in reason? I'd give you a sovereign or two occasionally. I couldn't see my own daughter's child want, though she made a runaway marriage which I never forgave."

"I don't want anything from you, grandpapa—not anything in this world," she replied, calmly. "Good-night, and good-bye."

He took a handful of money from his pocket, and counted five sovereigns on the table.

"Take that; it'll keep your pocket for a week or two, and if you need more you can let me know. Anything in reason I'll do, you may believe that."

Magdalen continued the buttoning of her gloves without offering to touch the money.

"And if you don't like living with your aunt," continued the old gentleman, quite cheerfully, rather elated to find the girl give so very little trouble, "you should try something else. What would you think of becoming a nurse? A lot of young ladies are turning their attention to that now."

"I couldn't do it," replied Magdalen, in a still strained voice. "I might nurse people

I cared for; but strangers, no. I am not gentle enough, nor unselfish enough either. I shall never do that. Well, good-bye, grandpapa."

She held out her hand, looking him straightly in the face. He glanced suggestively at the sovereigns making a bright spot on the crimson table-cover, and stretched out his hand to lift them. But Magdalen shook her head, with the faintest touch of hauteur.

"No, thank you, grandpapa, I don't want your money."

"You may need it. Pocket your pride, if it's that, and take it. Never refuse money; that's a very good motto for you, Magdalen."

"I don't want it," she repeated. "Good-bye."

"You're a fool, then. Take it, see. Five gold sovereigns are not to be had for the taking every day. Question how long it may be before you see the colour of gold in that hungry Edinburgh, whose streets are paved with nothing but poverty and pride," he said, gruffly, and pushed them towards her again.

Words more bitter than anything she had uttered were on Magdalen's lips, but she forced them back, and with a decided motion of her head she turned to go.

"Good-bye! You may as well tell me what it was you were going to ask me," he said, looking, for the moment, loth to let her go. She looked so like the dead girl, who had never recovered the estrangement from her father her marriage had caused, that a

"TRY AND FORGET THAT YOU EVER HAD A FATHER" (*p.* 30).

vague, unwonted emotion stirred in his withered heart.

Magdalen faintly smiled.

"It was an absurd request.'

"Absurd or not, tell me what it was?"

"I thought I would ask you to buy Lavery's portrait of papa, and give it to me; very absurd, indeed, wasn't it? Good-bye."

CHAPTER IV.

CHUMS.

"I SAY, Tommy, who in the name of wonder came into the room just now?"

"Wasn't it the 'Crater'?"

"No, it was a young lady, Tommy, a revelation in a trailing black gown and a white cap such as you don't often see in the humble digs of the student."

"Well, don't excite yourself, my boy, and hold your peace, will you? I had just got the hang of this thing when you broke in with your confounded tongue, and now I'm hopelessly off it," replied the individual addressed as 'Tommy,' in an injured voice. "If you can't be quiet, Frank, we must split; there's nothing else for it."

"Oh, humbug! Toss Quain aside, and let's talk. Who can grind between dinner and tea? It's not in human nature," cried the tall, fair-haired lad, making his book spin across the room.

"It is not in human nature either, Frank, to sail through the second without due digestion of Quain," answered his companion,

with a yawn, and closing his book not unwillingly. "Fourteen weeks on Friday last, and we're in for it."

"In for a jolly all-round ploughing, I take it," put in Frank Stormont, philosophically. "It's well to be prepared beforehand."

"No, by Jove, Frank, that won't do for me. The governor won't stand that kind of thing. He forgets that there may be a slight change for the worse since he was up here grinding for his second. He won't believe that it's something more than child's play."

"Then I'd make him. I'd go on failing systematically until he began to inquire into the thing," said Frank Stormont, lazily. "He'd be obliged to capitulate for his own credit. As you are his son, you see, and have inherited such abilities as you possess, self-respect would make him lenient."

"It's easy for you to air that kind of logic. You have no governor to bully you," said Tom Gilruth, not without a touch of bitterness. "If I were to try any such things it would be simply a suicidal policy. He'd cut me off as fast as light a cigar."

"No, he wouldn't. You're an only son, and he can't afford to do it. I think you're too hard on the old chap, Tom."

"Maybe. I sometimes wish that I had inherited a little more from him: his insensibility, for instance. You can't hurt his feelings, you can only touch his pride. I'm too like my poor mother for my own comfort."

"Do you know, I have the most intense curiosity to behold your stern parent? Why do you never invite me Gilmanscleugh?"

"Because I daren't. I hinted at it once, and he sat upon me properly, I assure you."

"But, bless me, Tom Gilruth, are you going to be sat upon to such an extent all your days? Doesn't the Bible say somewhere, 'Parents provoke not your children to wrath'? You're far too easy with him. Why, Gilmanscleugh's your home, and if you can't take the use of it, where's the good of having it at all?"

"That's what I ask myself sometimes," said the other, more to himself than to his companion.

"And are you going to retire to that sweet spot and be *locum tenens*, severely under control for the rest of your natural life? I'd emigrate first, and practise on the noble red man rather than that, Tommy. Let's ring for tea!"

"What did the new help come for just now? Oh, the *Dispatch*. Pass it over then, and ring the bell. I see you are on tenterhooks to see her again. It'll be one for you if the 'Crater' comes in next time."

"Will you bet on it?" asked the incorrigible, with his hand on the bell-pull.

"Can't afford it," the other replied, indifferently, as he turned to the summary of the evening paper. Frank Stormont walked to the other side of the room, picked up his discarded 'Anatomy,' and sat down at the fireside with it open in his hand. There was thus perfect silence in the room when a slight knock came to the door, followed by the entrance of some one with a tea-tray.

Tom Gilruth looked up when he heard the clatter of cups in the room, and saw a tall, young person in a black gown moving the books and papers from the table. She had her back to him; but presently, as she returned from placing the books on the sideboard, he saw her face. There was nothing in its beauty to strike him, but there was something peculiar in its expression. It seemed absolutely passive, as if there were no feelings within to be indicated in her features. He could not see her eyes, for the lids were kept down, but he noticed her hands, as they deftly moved about the table, and they interested him. They were not common hands. He even forgot himself so far as to continue looking at her after he felt that she was quite conscious of his scrutiny. There was certainly nothing in that pale, passive face to indicate any such consciousness, but he felt it instinctively; and presently, somewhat rebuked, he turned his eyes upon his paper. Meanwhile, Frank was diverting his time between his books and making significant grimaces to his friend, where the lady-help could not observe him.

"I hope Miss Grey is quite well?" he ventured to say, politely, and even deferentially, hoping to see some sign of animation in the dark-robed figure moving about the room. But his remark was followed by an absolute silence, and having finished the arranging of the table, the young woman took up her tray and disappeared.

Then Tom Gilruth sat back in his chair and laughed in quiet enjoyment.

"That sat upon you, Frank, most profoundly. How did you like it, eh?"

"Not much. Do you think she's a deaf mute?"

"Not she. She heard you, my boy. She only showed you quietly that she does not wish to converse. I wonder who she can be?"

"I'll find out, if I should have to bribe the 'Crater,'" said Frank, with resolution.

"Perhaps the 'Crater's' away?" suggested the other.

"No, she isn't, because I fell over her on the stair as I came up. Why 'Craters' should always be washing stairs at untimeous hours is one of the mysteries connected with the lodging-house slavey. They're always at it. It's my belief that they fill up their odd minutes with it. I say, though, Tommy, it's rather interesting, isn't it, to be waited on by an entirely new order of being? What do you think she is?"

"Can't tell," answered the other, with a brevity which seemed to indicate indifference. In reality he was wondering the same thing himself.

"She can't be any kin to the landlady, as there's no resemblance," said Frank, with the liveliest interest. "Perhaps it's going to be a lodging-house romance. Shall I pour out your tea?"

"Yes. There's a lecture at the Philosophical to-night I should like to hear."

"What's the subject?"

"The Early Poets of Scotland."

"Doesn't sound very interesting to me.

I'll take your case in the Infirmary, if you like."

"It you'll take it I'll stay in and grind, Frank."

"All right; but you sit too much, Tommy, you really do. It's telling on you."

"I feel a little down. Never mind, to-morrow's Saturday, and we'll tramp every foot of the Pentlands, rain or shine, and Christmas will be here before we know where we are."

"Three weeks on Friday and I'm off. Won't you come home with me this time, Tom? It's no end of jolly at our house; though we've no governor, the mother keeps us in order, and at the same time lets us be as jolly as we like; and my sisters, though I say it, are—well—just stunners. There's three of them, Tom, and who knows what might *not* happen? Dear old chap, we might be brothers as well as chums some day."

Tom Gilruth slightly shook his head, and there was a curious mingling of affection and envy in the look he cast on the bright face of his friend. He was so happy, so sunshiny, so free from anxiety or care, he sometimes wondered what there could be in common between that happy heart and his, so weighed down by its morbid sensitiveness, its dull and hopeless view of life. And yet, though so utterly dissimilar, each seemed to find in the other something needful and satisfying, and the slight college acquaintance had ripened into the warmth and steadfastness of an undying friendship.

"Some day, perhaps, I may come, but not just now. I'm in the house of bondage, Frank, and I must render an account of every moment and every copper spent. I'll stay here and grind in the holidays."

"What! Aren't you going home at Christmas?"

"No; there's no Christmas at Gilmanscleugh, and it is a needless expense."

"But, bless me, what is the old boy hoarding up his guineas for? He'll have to hand them over to you some day. He can't take any of them with him. I must say again, Tommy, I think you're too soft. It mystifies me how you, who can be so resolute to say no in some things, can't hold your own against a cantankerous parent. If I were you I'd try a new plan with him, just for an experiment. If you'd take me down with you I'd even undertake to try it on my own account."

"You don't understand, Frank. My father is not a lovable man. I am told he had a great disappointment in his youth, and that he did not love my mother, although he married her. I believe she died of a broken heart, and starved by his neglect and indifference. I am like her, and he only tolerates me, that is all."

"Well, if that's so, I can't for the life of me understand why you should be qualifying yourself to pass a part of your life with him."

"But, Frank, in spite of it all, I feel drawn to him. I believe there's good and even kindness in him if it could be reached.

I don't think he treats me fairly; but I am in hopes that when we are together, sharing the same interests and pursuits, we may be something like what father and son should be. I'll give it a fair trial, anyhow."

"You're a queer beggar, Tom, and I only half understand you; but the first time I see Martin Gilruth, M.D., Esquire of Gilmanscleugh, if I feel a desire to punch his head, don't blame me. Well, I'm off. If the Princess comes in to remove the things, give her my compliments; and if it's the 'Crater,' don't forget to make some useful inquiries. Ta-ta."

In response to Tom's ring, the new inmate of the house reappeared, calm, expressionless, statuesque, as before. Again he watched her with deepening interest, and again she made no sign. He did not venture to address her, however; but when she left the room, he could not concentrate his attention on his books. There was something in that still and passionless face which haunted him. It was suggestive, like deep and motionless waters, of a fierce and rushing tide beneath.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW SITUATION.

MISS EUPHAME GREY was the type of a class. She had had her own living to make since her girlhood, and in the making had lost many of the womanly attributes which happier circumstances might have developed. She and her brother Alexander had started the race about the same time, but in the battle of life the odds are always against the woman. So, while Alexander Grey flourished and succeeded, and built himself a grand house, Miss Euphame grubbed along among her lodgers, and grew shrivelled and wizened, body and soul, with her bargaining and haggling. But somehow, perhaps because she was so strictly honest, she never succeeded in making anything beyond a bare livelihood. She had always felt rather sore against her brother—especially after his marriage—for the fine wife, the daughter of a Glasgow merchant, turned up her nose at the grim spinster, and affected a perfect horror at the very name of lodgers. This set up Miss Euphame's pride, and she de-

clined to have any dealings whatever with her brother's family. Perhaps it would be too much to say that the tragic circumstances of his downfall and death gave her satisfaction; but it was certain that a mild complacency mingled with her natural grief, and it was scarcely to be expected that she should altogether refrain from some expression of that complacency towards his daughter. But there was absolutely no satisfaction in "casting up" anything to Magdalen. She never flew into a passion, or resented anything except an aspersion cast upon her father's memory. Before she had been many days an inmate of the dingy house in Lauriston Gardens, Miss Euphame learned to avoid that subject. She was secretly amazed at the girl, who set herself with a strange, dogged kind of resolution to the routine of her daily toil. It was her own desire to supplant the "Crater" in her attendance upon the lodgers; and she did not flinch before her self-imposed task. Miss Euphame watched her with a kind of silent, stealthy wonder. Her opinion of young women as a class made her expect some exhibition of interest in the young men, and it aggravated her that Magdalen should be not only utterly indifferent to them, but apparently unable to distinguish one from the other. Once, when particularly aggravated by this supreme indifference in her niece, Miss Euphame ventured upon a mild sneer which hinted that "still waters run deep." Magdalen passed over the taunt in silence. In reality, she chafed against her

humble destiny every minute of every day; but she took a grim delight in trampling on herself and electing to perform the meanest tasks in her aunt's abode. What she meant by it the old lady often wondered, but somehow dared not ask her. Certain it is, the presence of her niece in the house made a vast difference to Miss Euphame, who now began to taste, for the first time, how sweet is a little leisure and an easy mind. The first week of Magdalen's stay in her new home the occupant of the back parlour had been absent with a hunting party in the country. He arrived, however, as usual, one afternoon without warning, making a great noise and bustle in the house. Magdalen, who had gone out to take a short walk across the meadows, returned at darkening to find the "Crater" in that hysterical condition in which the occupant of the back parlour invariably kept her. The "Crater" was a stunted little being, aged sixteen, remarkable for exceeding plainness of looks and fidelity of nature. Miss Euphame had taken pity on her in the days when she was a little stick girl plying her weary trade from door to door, and, learning that she was an orphan, had offered her a home, in return for which she was to do as she was bid. That solitary act of kindness, which Miss Euphame had performed perhaps as much out of self-interest as any other motive, was never forgotten by the Crater, who marked her appreciation of it by giving, of the best was in her, such faithful and willing service as is rarely met with among

her class. The Crater had her ambitions; she had been homeless—now she had a home; that stupendous fact justified, in her eyes, her most complete abnegation of self. From the first day she had regarded Magdalen—"Miss Mad'len," as she called her—with reverent and adoring awe. She spoke so kindly and gently to her always, and had such a sweet, sad face, that the brilliant imagination of the Crater had no difficulty in surrounding her personality with a wondrous halo of romance. Could Magdalen but have obtained a glimpse into the heart and mind of the little servant-maid she would have been wholly surprised. But the Crater concealed the workings of that brilliant organism by a more than ordinarily dense and dull expression in her dingy face.

Magdalen seldom thought of her except when she was in her way. She had felt, at first, the natural repulsion of a dainty and fastidious personality from one which was not dainty and *not* fastidious, but very grimy and unattractive. By degrees, however, the faithful devotion of the Crater, her silent adoration, crept into Magdalen's heart, touching it to quick gratitude, until there was established between them an unspoken sympathy and understanding. The Crater, with symptoms of distress in her face, opened the door to Magdalen when she returned from her walk that afternoon.

"He's back, an he's gaun on awfu' waur than ever. Oh, my!" she said, mysteriously.

"Who?" inquired Magdalen, quickly.

"Maister Brebner, in the back parlour;

she's no in. He rang the bell, and when I said the mistress was oot he flang a book at my heid, but I dodged it," said the Crater, with an agitated grin.

"What's the matter with him?" inquired Magdalen, as she followed the little maid into the kitchen.

"Oh, wha kens? There's his bell. Wull I gang an' see what he wants?" she inquired, rather nervously, as the bell gave a tremendous peal that rang through the house.

"No, wait a moment. He can't be allowed to behave like that," said Magdalen, firmly; and, putting down hat, cloak, and gloves, she marched, with a red spot in each cheek, into the back parlour. What was her amazement to behold a very handsome young man, looking like a gentleman, dancing a sort of hornpipe in the middle of the room. He stopped short in his curious exercise when the door opened, and looked at the person standing there in mute amazement. Magdalen saw that he had been drinking, and her face flushed at the bold admiration in his eyes as they met hers.

"What do you want, sir?" she asked, with all the dignity she could command.

"Ah, ah! Some dinner; something to eat, my—my dear," he said, familiarly. "Why is the whole confounded show out when I come, and no preparation for a fellow when he comes back? I'll give notice, tell the old shark, if I'm not better attended to. But, my beauty, who in the world are you?"

"My aunt is out," replied Magdalen, quickly, yet with a somewhat haughty air, which impressed itself on the stupefied senses of the youth before her. "Of course it will be some time before dinner can be prepared for you. There is nothing ready. I don't suppose my aunt knew you were coming."

"So she's your aunt? Jolly proud she ought to be to have such a fine piece of goods for a niece. I don't mind waiting; in fact, I don't care a hang about dinner if you'll come in and sit beside me. I want to hear all about you, and whether the light of your countenance is going to shine upon us permanently."

Magdalen, in a fine state of indignation, hastily closed the door and retired.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ILL LOON.

TOM GILRUTH, quietly reading in the front sitting-room, smiled when he heard the ringing of bells and general din in the house, surmising the cause. The lively Brebner very speedily made his presence felt wherever he went. Tom could not help wondering what effect Magdalen would have on Brebner, who was a great admirer of feminine beauty, and walked out half the pretty girls in the neighbourhood. This train of thought somewhat disturbed the studious habit, and, rising, he opened the window, and stretched himself with a huge yawn. He looked a big, broad, stalwart fellow as he did so, and the bare arm showing, white and firm, under his cuff belonged to no weakling. His face was pleasant too, though the features were strongly marked, and the square, solid jaw indicated considerable strength of character. In a word, our hero was a manly fellow. The prospect from the front sitting-room was not particularly cheerful. The street below—one of the many comprising the

students' garrison—was narrow, uninteresting, and monotonous. A lorry heaped high with bags of coal lumbered slowly and heavily along, making a fitting accompaniment to the coalman's hoarse roar as he vended his wares. The lamplighter, brisk, energetic, cheerful, came whistling along, and Tom, leaning over the window, wished him a pleasant evening. At an open window opposite a boyish youth in shirt-sleeves was smoking and fingering the strings of his banjo—his feet on the window sill. Tom nodded over to him, several pantomimic gestures passed between them, when suddenly Tom's attention was arrested by a woman's faint scream. In a moment he had thrown open his room door, and in the dingily lighted little hall saw Magdalen sheltering behind the Crater; while Brebner, laughing, ran back to his room. When Magdalen saw Tom's honest face she came towards him, her usually pale face flushed high, and her eyes bright with indignation. Tom's heart beat as he saw with what confidence she looked at him.

"Oh, Mr. Gilruth, will you, please, watch Mr. Brebner? Lock him in, or anything, till my aunt comes in," she said, agitatedly. "I am so afraid I must go out."

"Has he insulted you, the brute?" said Tom, feeling strongly tempted to use a much more expressive term, though not addicted to the use of forcible language.

"Yes, he has. I was passing from the kitchen to my aunt's room when he stepped out of the darkness and laid his hand on

my arm," said Magdalen, shamefacedly, all her reserve gone. "How dared he? Could you not tell him he must at once leave the house?"

Tom could have smiled, but preserved the utmost gravity.

"Never mind the fool, Miss Grey; probably he's had too many glasses of beer for lunch, or possibly a brandy-and-soda. He's rather given to it, but not a very bad fellow at bottom. Don't be alarmed. I'll talk to him, and when he's quite sober he'll be awfully ashamed of himself; he's really a gentlemanly chap."

Magdalen incredulously shook her head, and, retiring into the kitchen, carefully closed the door. Then, to the no small consternation of the Crater, she dropped into a chair and began to weep. It was, perhaps, natural that she should magnify the trifling occurrence into a real insult; nevertheless, her behaviour was a puzzle to the Crater.

"Are ye feared, Miss Mad'len? Oh, *he* canna hurt ye; an' when he flings things he aye misses, even if you dinna dodge," she said, with consoling cheerfulness. "An' he gies me a shillin' sometimes. Oh, he's no a bad sort. I wadna greet for *him*."

The mild contempt thrown into the utterance of the pronoun made Magdalen smile through her tears. It was rather funny, after all, and the idea of dodging the erratic Mr. Brebner's missiles was very ludicrous. Thus the Crater took the best possible way of restoring Magdalen's ruffled equanimity. Meanwhile, Tom Gilruth did not long remain

standing in the dingy hall, but strode into Brebner's room, with rather a grim expression on his face.

"I say, Brebner, you confounded, consummate ass, what do you mean making such a disturbance in the house? Can't you lock yourself into your room, or go to bed, when you've had too many B's and S's?"

Brebner, who had thrown himself into an easy-chair, looked up with a rather dazed expression on his face.

"What's all the row about?" he inquired, innocently. "How are you, old fellow?"

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Brebner, coming home like this, and frightening women-folk out of their wits?" asked Tom, sternly; and, sitting down on the cop of the table, he surveyed the culprit with unpromising severity.

"What women-folk? Who is she?" he inquired, with interest. "Fine-looking girl; uncommon fine-looking—'pon my word, she is."

Somehow these words enraged Tom, and his face became even sterner.

"She's a lady, you fool, and you might have seen it before you made such an ass of yourself."

"A lady! What's she doing here then? Oh, a lady, is she? What's her name?"

He said the last words in rather a drowsy tone, and Tom perceived that the liquor, whatever it was, was now taking its full effect, and that the next moment he would be fast asleep.

"You'd better go to bed, I think," he said, with a kind of pitying contempt, and, turning on his heel, quitted the room.

Brebner, however, did not take his advice, but continued to sleep where he was until Miss Euphame herself, having returned from her afternoon's visiting in the suburbs, came in to interview him. Magdalen had, of course, told her the incidents of the afternoon; and though the old lady did not say much, she was inwardly greatly annoyed, and entered the offender's room with the fullest intention of reprimanding him. She found the place in darkness, and nearly stumbled over him seeking for the matches. When the gas was lit she surveyed him for a moment with rather a curious expression on her face. Strange as it may seem, this wild youth, who gave her more trouble than any lodger she had ever had, was her favourite among them all, and there was a softness in her eye as it dwelt on his fair, flushed face which would have astonished those who only knew the thorny side of Miss Euphame's character.

"Puir chield, he's a wild loon; but——"

She did not finish the sentence, for the glare of the light disturbed the sleeper, and he opened his eyes. Seeing his landlady confronting him, he sat up, trying to collect his thoughts.

"I've been asleep—cold, isn't it, Miss Grey?" he said, rather confusedly. "I came back rather suddenly, didn't I? Sorry to give trouble, but you see the hunting was poor in Lanarkshire, and the party broke up rather suddenly."

"You might have sent a telegram, I think," said Miss Grey, severely. "You'll get your death sleeping here without a fire, but Katie's comin' wi' coals."

"All right. Get me some tea, will you? I'd rather a heavy lunch, and I don't want any dinner."

Miss Euphame nodded, and still hesitated, not liking to allude to the incident of the afternoon.

"Tell the young lady, will you, I'm sorry if I alarmed her?" said Brebner, suddenly. "Fact is, Miss Grey, I and two other fellows took a champagne lunch at the Rutland, when we came off the train; and champagne plays havoc with a fellow's head. Tell her I didn't mean anything."

"I'm glad you've spoken, because I was gaun to speak," said Miss Euphame. "An', I say, sir, ye've been wi' me twa year noo, an' ye'll excuse me speakin'. D'ye think your father an' mither, awa' oot there in Sooth America, wud like to ken hoo ye are spendin' the time?"

"I'm sure they wouldn't," said the youth, cheerfully. "But what they don't know won't do them any harm. Well, who is she—the young lady? She wasn't here when I went away, a week ago."

"It's my niece from Glasgow," replied Miss Euphame, shortly. "Her father died, and she's cum to 'bide wi' me. I'll send in your tea, then, in a minute."

"Oh, I say, don't go away," he said, quite pleadingly. "There isn't any hurry. Tell me about the young lady. It will be very

nice for you having her. Do you think she'd allow me to apologise to her?"

"I dinna ken. She was very angry. Ye see she's been by ordinar brocht up quite different from me," said Miss Euphame, confidentially, and rather proudly, nothing loth to make the most of circumstances. "She's a queer lassie. Although she has had servants to wait on her since she was a bairn she's no ower proud to work here. She'll no let me dae onything hardly. But for a' that, she's as prood as Lucifer."

"Well, tell her I did not mean to be rude," said Brebner, really ashamed of himself.

Miss Euphame nodded, and retired. With her own hands she made ready the back-parlour tea, toasting the thin slices of bread daintily, and making the tray look as appetising as possible. Magdalen, busy with some household sewing, looked once or twice at her aunt rather inquiringly, wondering what the soft expression in her face might mean.

"He wants to apologise to ye," she said, brusquely. "Will ye let him?"

Magdalen looked up surprisedly. "If he has sent an apology by you, Aunt Euphame, pray tell him I am much obliged, and that it is accepted," she replied, with the air of a duchess; thinking nothing incongruous in the whole situation. Miss Euphame could not refrain from a smile of pure amusement.

"He's no an ill loon; only ower fond o' the drink," she said, as she put the toast carefully into the little china rack. "An' he has ower muckle money. What folk

mean by lettin' sic bairns, awa' thoosands o' miles frae hame, wi' as muckle money as they like to spend, *I* dinna ken."

"Where does he come from?"

"South America. His father's a grand gentleman there—something in the Government. I like the laddie. He's no ill kindet, only foolish."

Magdalen laid down her sewing, and rose.

"I'll take the tray, Aunt Euphame."

"Will ye, though?"

"Yes; why not? I wait on the other two. I'm not going to shirk my duty. Give it to me."

She lifted the tray, and, with her head in the air, marched out of the kitchen. Miss Euphame looked after her with a curious mingling of pride, admiration, and surprise on her face.

"*She's* a leddy, Kate," she said to the Crater, who nodded appreciatively and answered,—

"Imphm."

CHAPTER VII.

AN APOLOGY.

MAGDALEN knocked at the back-parlour door and walked quietly in. The offending Brebner, smoking a cigarette in the easy-chair, first looked in astonishment, and then, throwing away his cigarette, leaped to his feet.

"I'm very much obliged to you, Miss Grey," he said, a trifle shamefacedly for him, "and I hope you'll forgive me for making an ass of myself as I did this afternoon."

"There is nothing to forgive," Magdalen replied, with the gentle, gracious dignity which sat beautifully upon her. She looked at the young man as she spoke, and the icy calmness of her face softened. The charm of his smile impressed her, as it did most people at first sight. Brebner possessed that subtle and dangerous gift, a winning personality, which made itself felt wherever he went, and won him friends even among those who highly disapproved his graceless habits and utter disregard of propriety in every form. His debonair manner, his

sunny temper and happy face, covered a very considerable share of selfishness, which, however, only showed itself when his will was thwarted or his ease disturbed. The only child of wealthy parents, who idolised him, Will Brebner was the product of environment. The child who from his infancy has never known what it is to have a whim or desire thwarted can scarcely fail to develop into a self-willed and selfish man, intolerant of restraint. To send such a lad to a gay University town, so far from home, and supply him with unlimited money, would seem, in the eyes of most reasonable people, the surest way to compass his destruction. And, so far, Will Brebner had remained true to his early training, and had, during the two years of his residence in Edinburgh, sown sufficient wild oats to last him a lifetime.

It is, to the observant and contemplative mind, a sad and serious problem, this spectacle of hundreds of untried, inexperienced youths who find themselves in the University town, whither they have been sent to obtain culture and knowledge, cut adrift from every home influence, and with no substitute to keep them straight. Those who have profited by pious example and Christian precept do not find temptation hard to withstand; but what of the many who are before it like chaff before the wind? Let the long list of melancholy failures, of blighted hopes, and frustrated ambitions answer that question.

In two years Brebner had done nothing

save sow the aforesaid wild oats; and his prospect of ever graduating at his Alma Mater was very shadowy indeed. Meanwhile, however, his shortcomings did not concern him at all. His gentlemanly instinct made him ashamed because he had frightened a woman, and forgotten himself so far, under the influence of drink, as to lay his hand on her; and he made haste, as a gentleman will, to apologise for rudeness. But there was nothing more.

"You see, Miss Grey," he went on, in his winning, boyish fashion, as Magdalen laid the things on the table, "I took champagne at lunch, a beastly stupid thing to do, and I wasn't *compos mentis*; that's a fact. I'm awfully sorry."

"There is no use saying any more about it," replied Magdalen, quietly. "But why *did* you take champagne at lunch? I suppose you knew it would have a bad effect on you?"

She looked at him very directly as she spoke, and Brebner thought he had never seen a lovelier pair of eyes—so calm, so deep, so steady in their gaze. He felt a trifle flattered, too, that she lingered a moment to speak with him after her indignation of the afternoon.

"Oh, well, you see, when a few fellows get together they don't stop to think of consequences," he said, still apologetically. "We had awfully bad hunting, you see—frost every day—and we wanted something to keep our spirits up."

Magdalen smiled—very suddenly and

sweetly—and Brebner regarded her with increased admiration. She was certainly a fine-looking woman, he told himself, and a lady, moreover, from top to toe.

"I should advise you to take something lighter next time," she said, pleasantly. "But I thought you were a student?" She glanced round the room as she spoke, and smiled a little more. It certainly did not look conspicuously like the home of a student, but rather the den of a gay, sport-loving youth.

The narrow mantel-shelf had the inevitable litter of pipes; a gun stood in one corner, side by side with a bundle of golf-sticks and a fishing-rod. Several sporting journals lay on the hard, horsehair couch, and the hideous, dingy wall-paper was adorned by portraits of favourite jockeys and their respective steeds. The only article which served to indicate that it was the abode of a medical student was a very perfect skull mounted on a bracket, with a pipe irreverently stuck between its teeth.

"Oh, so I am, and I *do* grind sometimes," he said, confidentially. "I'm going to begin in earnest after Christmas, because the governor's beginning to cut up rough because I haven't got through my first. Must make a stupendous effort to sail through next summer. Beastly bore, exams., aren't they? But how some fellows do sail through them! See Gilruth, for instance, an awful grinding chappie he is; always at it. But what pleasure has he in life? Any, do you suppose?"

"His work may give him pleasure. I should think it does," said Magdalen, with her hand on the door-nob. "And he has the satisfaction of accomplishing something. Suppose you try it?"

It was far from Magdalen's intention to preach to the youth who had so direly offended her in the afternoon; indeed, she was more than surprised at herself for entering into conversation with him at all. But the subtle charm of Will's manner had won her, as it did most people, when he exerted himself to please.

"Well, I really mean to, some day," replied Brebner, in the same half-confidential way. "I say, will you excuse me saying how awfully slow it must be for you here? Rather hard lines all round."

"I don't mind it," said Magdalen, a trifle more stiffly, when the conversation took a more personal turn. "And now I must go. Good-evening."

She closed the door with some haste, and entered the kitchen, where Miss Euphame was waiting tea for her, secretly wondering what had detained her so long.

"He took a gey while to apo'gise, surely," she said, drily. Whereat Magdalen laughed. The shrewd eyes of the old spinster were quick to note the heightened colour on the girl's cheek, also the brightness of her eye, and wondered what had wrought the change.

"Was he ceevil?" she queried further, as Magdalen did not vouchsafe any reply to her first remark.

"Oh, quite; he seems a nice lad," she answered.

"What were ye speakin' aboot?" queried Miss Euphame, too curious to hide it.

"Oh, not much. Have I been long in the room?" asked Magdalen. "What a pity he wastes his time so much. There's brain and intellect yonder."

"Ye liket the lad?" said Aunt Euphame, complacently. "So do I. No mony hae a guid word for him; but I wad suner hae him than the twa in the front."

"Oh, not I! I think Mr. Gilruth a splendid fellow. But why does he never look happy, aunt? He looks as if he carried all the world's care on his shoulders."

"He has a thrawn faither, I believe. He was here yince; a lang, nippet cratur', that wad put the fear o' death on a body," said Aunt Euphame, in expressive idiom. "I say, Magdalen, I believe ye like no that ill to bide here. After a', it's but natural for a young lassie to like the company o' lads."

Magdalen could not refrain from laughing outright at this statement of opinion. She certainly felt brighter, and as if a new interest in life were awakened. She even looked at the gaunt visage of her aunt with the kindliest approval, forgetting to be struck with the ludicrous headgear, an erection of crape and jingling bugles, worn in honour of her brother's memory. After all, she had misjudged her aunt, and had accepted her grim speeches as the true expressions of the nature, forgetting that there might be depths not always revealed to the casual

eye—depths of tenderness which could bless all they touched.

"You are very kind to me, Aunt Euphame. I have not been grateful," she said; and with one of those sudden impulses which sometimes came to her, and were always graceful in the act, she laid her hand, which hard work had not yet made hard and unlovely, on the spinster's withered fingers. "But I will do more. I will, indeed."

"Dinna mak' a fule o' yersel'," said Miss Euphame, with unpromising sharpness. "I wonder where that Katie is—in the coal-hole likely. Here, Katie, I want you to run an errand."

Katie had already gone on an errand, which the old lady had by no means forgotten. Nevertheless, under pretence of seeking the luckless offender, she got up rather hastily; not, however, before Magdalen had caught sight of a tear, a most unusual visitant to the eye of Miss Euphame; and from that moment there was established between aunt and niece a silent understanding, which made life happier for both.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CONQUEST.

BREBNER, being an impressionable youth, immediately fell in love, after his fashion, with the interesting young lady, his landlady's niece. It was inevitable. Brebner had never been known to be in the vicinity of an attractive member of the gentle sex without burning incense at her shrine. His infatuation, while it lasted, was very genuine; but, as a rule, was of short duration. He had had, since coming to Edinburgh, love-affairs too numerous to mention, and in his trunks were many mementoes of the same in the shape of letters and photographs, withered flowers and sentimental verses, which would have done no discredit to the treasure-store of the most romantic of school-girls.

Brebner, from his mother's side, had inherited a touch of warm Southern blood in his veins, and while his fancy lasted could not brook the slightest obstacle in the way, nor the slightest delay in the declaration of it.

He found Magdalen, however, rather more

difficult to deal with than any girl he had yet honoured with his attention. Next time she came into his room she answered his remarks in monosyllables, and preserved in her face a look of such icy indifference as could not fail to disconcert him. This, as may be expected, only served to increase his interest in her, and he spent an hour, which might have been more profitably devoted to his books, in wondering by what means he could propitiate the new goddess, and re-awaken the interest she seemed to take in him the first time they exchanged words. He was one of the vainest of his kind. He knew he was handsome; his looking-glass and many a pretty damsel had told him so often enough to convince him, and he had not yet met the girl who could resist his manner, with its subtle caressingness and deferential tenderness, which to many women are most attractive. He was, in fact, in that state of mind when he required to be taught a very wholesome lesson. The result of his cogitations was to remember that she had urged him to work, and, as she had expressed approval of Gilruth's industry, Brebner immediately decided to try the effect of a sudden and unprecedented application to books. He got up suddenly, and, catching sight of the uninteresting array of pipes, also a suggestive apparition of a brandy-flask on the mantelpiece, he first proceeded to give a more studious aspect to his room. Having swept the offending meerschaums and briars pell-mell into the lower shelf of the cupboard, and dusted it

down with his cambric handkerchief, he began to look at his books, and ruefully discovered them likewise thick with dust, and some of the leaves uncut. He removed from the shelves sundry French and sporting novels, and rearranged a very sedate and solemn row of heavy tomes, which were supposed to hold the keys of his future success. Then he laid several on the table, brought out his class note-books, lighted his reading-lamp, and sat down prepared to do some hard reading. In this interesting attitude, with his head buried in his hands, and his eyes bent religiously on chemistry, Magdalen found him when she brought in the supper-tray. The Crater—for various reasons, the chief of which was extreme nervousness and awkwardness—was never allowed to carry meals into the gentlemen's rooms; that duty had devolved entirely on Miss Euphame until her niece came. As Magdalen had no practical knowledge of cookery, she thought herself in duty bound to do what she could, and therefore had insisted from the first day in waiting on the lodgers, though it was at a considerable sacrifice of pride. But she was a young woman of great resolution, and could perform the hardest duty without flinching. The faintest shadow of surprise flitted across her face when she beheld the unusually studious attitude of the back-parlour lodger, but she did not presume to offer a remark. With deft hands she placed the tray on the unoccupied end of the table, and was about to retire, when Brebner, heaving a

sigh, threw himself back on his chair and spoke.

"Is it nine already, Miss Grey? I've no appetite. I ought to have been out for a stroll before supper. Been at it since tea. I'm really working in earnest; that should please you."

"Why should it?"

Magdalen could not refrain from the question, and there was an unconscious touch of coquetry in her attitude and tone as she asked it. Brebner managed to throw a good deal of reproach into his expression as he replied,—

"Well, you know you were rather hard on me the other day for *not* working, and I determined to turn over a new leaf, and, upon my word, I'm going to do it. You see, nobody ever took any interest in me before."

This was a bold stroke, and a pure fabrication as well.

Magdalen coloured a little, thinking he took too much for granted.

"I did not say I took any interest in you," she said, with her lovely smile, which played sad havoc with the impressionable Brebner's heart.

"No, of course you didn't; but I hope you do all the same," said the youth, with unblushing effrontery. "You see, it might be the making of me. It's been hard lines on me all along, being so far from home, and with nobody to care a hang—I beg your pardon, I mean a fig—what I did, or whether I worked or not."

"Well, but there's your father and mother in South America. Don't you suppose they

"'I DID NOT SAY I TOOK ANY INTEREST IN YOU,' SHE SAID" (*p.* 68).

are anxious for you to do well? Besides," she added, with the slightest inflection of scorn in her voice, "if I were a man, I'd work for work's sake, because I wanted to take an honourable place among other men. I think your excuse rather poor."

Then suddenly she quitted the room, taken aback all at once by the thought that she was talking familiarly to a man of whom she knew nothing, and who would probably only amuse himself at her expense.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Brebner; and, in spite of his love-lorn state, he immediately sat down, and partook of a hearty supper. Then he lit a cigarette, and sauntered across the little hall to the front sitting-room to pay a visit to his fellow-lodgers, though there was not, as a rule, much coming and going between them. With a familiar tap, he pushed his head round the door.

"Hulloa, old chappie," he said, observing Tom sitting all alone before the fire, with his feet on the mantel, and a book before him. "Where's Stormont? Can I come in?"

"I suppose you will whether you may or not," Tom answered, a trifle ungraciously. "He's gone to the Lyceum."

"Lazy beggar! I've been grinding since six. Do knock off and have a cigarette. They're prime, I tell you."

Tom reluctantly took his feet off the mantelshelf, and closed his book. He was not fond of Brebner, who was generally considered by steady fellows to be "a waster," and therefore to be shunned.

Frank, again, was only a gay idler, who loved afternoon teas and students' nights at the theatres, and any other harmless fun that came in his way, but was at heart as steady as a rock. Tom secretly wondered what was the meaning of this very friendly advance on Brebner's part, and could scarcely refrain from saying so.

Not at all put out by the coolness of his reception, Brebner passed over his cigarette-case, and threw himself into Frank's chair.

"What an awful grind you are, Gilruth! Do you think it pays to stew so hard?"

"Yes I do; it's the only way to get through, nowadays."

"So it is, I suppose," said Brebner, serenely. "Say, what do you think of the new importation here?"

"What do you mean?" asked Tom, stooping to a little fraud, which was, however, perfectly patent to Brebner, who was much astonished by the rather peculiar expression on Tom's usually rather unreadable countenance.

"Oh, you know, old chappie, the new Phyllis we've got. By Jove, doesn't she make a fellow's food taste twice as sweet? Rather a queer business all round. She's a lady, isn't she? Does she come in here?"

"Yes, always."

"And hasn't she been winding up Stormont about his idle habits?" asked Brebner, curiously. "She's a stunner."

"She has never, in my hearing, uttered a single word in this room," replied Tom, rather drily.

"Oh, I say, hasn't she? We have no end of jolly talks next door," said Brebner, consequentially. "She seems to take a strong interest in yours truly."

"Indeed," said Tom, quite drily still. He did not, indeed, believe a word Brebner said, but was too polite to say so.

"She's uncommonly handsome, don't you think? Thorough good style, too?" said Brebner, pursuing the theme in which he was for the time being intensely interested. "Beastly shame, isn't it, that she should have to grub along in a hole like this? It's the sort of thing that makes a fellow think of Gretna Green and other unorthodox escapades; upon my word it is. I believe she's just the kind of girl who wouldn't care a fig for the world's opinion."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Tom, rather interestedly. "That Miss Grey would go to Gretna with you if you asked her?"

"Oh, well!—she might—but there would be the devil to pay at Valparaiso; that's all. Still, they'd get over it when they saw her, don't you think?"

Tom looked with considerable keenness into the clear, delicately-cut face of the South American, seeking almost to read his soul. It was certainly a curious turn for the conversation to take, and Tom could not but wonder what was at the bottom of it.

"You're a queer fish, Brebner. What's become of that little Royal girl you were so fond of?"

"Gone off with a handsomer man," said Brebner, with supreme indifference. "*That* was only fun."

"And is this earnest?" queried Tom, quizzically, and with a touch of sarcastic humour about his mouth.

"Well, it might be—a fellow might do worse, don't you think?"

"He might, certainly; but you're talking awful rot, Brebner. I never saw such a fool about women as you."

"I'm built that way; it's treason not to admire a pretty woman, I think; but this one's more than pretty; she has style and spirit and common sense. She won't stand any nonsense, and I admire her for it."

Tom looked at Brebner in simple wonder. By what means, save that of pure presumption, did Brebner claim so much knowledge of the woman with whom Tom had not yet exchanged more than half a dozen words, though it had been the desire of his life to know her better.

"Do you mean to say, Brebner—you, with all your pride of birth, and so on, which you've so often aired before us—would think for a moment seriously of a girl of Miss Grey's position?"

"Yes," said Brebner, calmly, "I would."

Tom looked at him with a sudden, quick glance, noting jealously the supple grace of his figure and the delicate features of his face. Yes, he was such an one as women love, and, for the moment, the world seemed dark to hard-working, plain Tom Gilruth.

"I wish you'd clear out, Brebner," he

said, rather grumpily. "It's only millionaires like you who can afford to idle; I can't."

Brebner picked himself up from the chair, only to sit down on the top of the table, and continue his idle talk. When he did finally take himself off, Tom did not find it easy to concentrate his attention, and, in fact, made no attempt.

Brebner had left him something a great deal more interesting, and certainly more puzzling, to occupy his thoughts.

CHAPTER IX.

A MISTAKEN IMPRESSION.

"AUNT Euphame, I'd rather not go any more into Mr. Brebner's room." Magdalen said this a little shamefacedly one evening about a week after her first unceremonious introduction to that youth.

"What for no?" queried Miss Euphame, fixing her eagle eye full on her niece's changing face.

"Because he's a foolish boy, Aunt Euphame, and says things to me I don't wish to hear."

"Does he mak' love to ye, d'ye mean?"

"Well, I suppose that it is that," said Magdalen, smiling a little, and reddening still more.

"He has a guid stock o' impidence, then," quoth the old lady, wrathfully, "an' I'll tell him to mend his manners or leave my hoose."

"Oh, he has not been rude, auntie. There is no need for such extreme measures as that," said Magdalen, quickly. "I told him yesterday if he said any more such things to me, I should not come in again."

"Seein' ye've telt me as muckle, ye had better tell me mair," said Miss Euphame, grimly. "What has the lad said to you? Have I no the richt to speir?"

"Oh yes, you have. Well, he has asked me to marry him, Aunt Euphame; at least, it amounts to that," said Magdalen, calmly.

"What?"

Miss Euphame nearly dropped the cup she held in her hand, and her face wore a look of blank consternation comical to behold.

"Has the cratur ta'en leave o' his leevin' senses?"

"I don't know. He seems in earnest; so much so, that I'd rather not see him any oftener than is imperative. It is very tiresome."

Magdalen delivered herself of this expression of feeling with the utmost calmness. Miss Euphame was glad to drop into the nearest chair in order to take in fully this startling piece of information.

"Was't no in fun!"

"I don't think so. He seemed earnest enough; but he is a foolish boy."

"What did ye say?"

It is impossible to describe the eager interest Miss Euphame managed to throw into her voice, and, indeed, which illuminated her whole demeanour. When is a woman too old or too uninteresting to be stirred by a love affair? It is the one theme in the universe which never loses its perennial freshness for the female heart.

"What could I say, aunt, but that he

talked nonsense, to which I could not listen?" was Magdalen's reply.

Miss Euphame began to reflect—and her face became a study.

"I say, lassie," she began, most impressively, "if he be in earnest, what for no?"

"I don't understand you in the least."

"What for should ye no tak' him? He's weelfaured, an' no ill-kinded, an' he's rich—at least, his folk are. What for no?"

"Oh, auntie, don't you be silly too. Why, I have only known the boy a week! How *can* you talk such nonsense?"

"It micht no be nonsense," quoth Miss Euphame, so excitedly that her bugle trimmings began to jingle cheerfully. "An' ye are as guid as him."

"Oh, auntie, I wish I hadn't told you. I never thought you were such an old goose," said Magdalen, who, since that subtle understanding had been established between them, treated her aunt with a certain playfulness of manner which secretly pleased, while it astonished, the old lady. The rich old merchant in Blythswood Square, miserable among his money-bags, would have been considerably amazed had he known how comfortable, how really happy, his proud and unreasonable granddaughter was in her humble home, and how little she regretted the luxuries to which she had been accustomed. He thought of her, it must be confessed, pretty often, and with sundry qualms, but bided his time, confident that she would yet come back to him in a better frame of mind. It took the old gentleman

some time to feel kindly to a person who had looked with contempt on five gold sovereigns. But he had even, in his softer moods, laid plans for the bringing of Magdalen to Blythswood Square as his housekeeper and companion. But his opportunity never came.

"I micht no be sic a goose efter a'. Could ye no fancy the lad?" queried Miss Euphame, still more impressively.

"Indeed I couldn't," Magdalen responded, without a moment's hesitation. "If I ever marry, Aunt Euphame, it'll be a man I can respect."

"Hoots, ye are ower parteeclar. Ye canna aye wale the pick o' the lot, an' ye could mak' him worth respectin'. He's a lad that has a heap o' guid in him, only it wants bringin' oot."

Magdalen shook her head, and at that moment the back sitting-room bell rang, reminding Miss Euphame of neglected duty.

For two or three days the old lady herself carried in Brebner's meals. It really touched her to see the look of disappointment in his face each time she opened the door, and the dejected manner in which he regarded her. But neither mentioned Magdalen's name until the third evening when Brebner seemed to be reduced to a state of despair.

"I hope Miss Magdalen is well," he ventured humbly to remark.

"Yes, she's quite weel, thank ye," Miss Euphame replied, in rather an embarrassed manner, feeling the delicacy of the situation.

"I hope I have said nothing to offend her," said the youth, dolefully. "Will you please give her my compliments, and tell her I said so?"

"Yes, I will. She has telt me what way she'll no come in. Ye hae been rather sudden, my man—no a week in the hoose wi' her. It was enough to mak' ony lass bide awa', an' my niece Magdalen is very proud."

"She is—she has the pride of a queen, and I admire her for it," said Brebner, enthusiastically. "But I said nothing to her I did not mean. I'd say it all over before the whole world."

"Maybe, but what wud your folk say?" queried Miss Euphame, doubtfully. "Ye are dependent on them, an' maunna anger them. An' mind ye, *my* niece winna mak' hersel' cheap to onybody." So saying, Miss Euphame withdrew, feeling that she had decidedly the best of the situation. Sitting idly by the window a short time after, Brebner beheld the object of his affections walk across the street with a somewhat leisurely step, as if merely going for a stroll. In less than five minutes' time he had put on boots, coat, and hat, and followed her. The afternoon was closing in, the shadows of the misty night already darkening over the city; nevertheless, Brebner's eyes were sharp enough to discern the slender figure of the woman he loved, as she took the turning into Chalmers' Crescent. He followed her in a leisurely fashion, but managed to come up to her as she passed out into the open space

of the Meadows. She gave a start of surprise when she saw him, and coloured a trifle haughtily, signs which Brebner, with his customary self-conceit, totally misunderstood.

"Good-evening, Miss Magdalen. Are you going for a stroll? How fortunate! So am I. May I accompany you?"

"I don't think so," Magdalen replied quickly, and walking on as she spoke.

"Oh, why not? If I have offended you, do forgive me. I am the most unlucky dog on earth, always giving offence where I only wish to please. But don't punish me so severely. If I promise to be on my best behaviour, won't you let me walk with you a little? Please, do."

He could be very winning when he liked. Few women could resist that smile, with its mixture of sweetness and flattering deference. The sternness of Magdalen's face relaxed.

"You are a foolish boy, Mr. Brebner. I suppose you may come whether I allow you or not."

"Now, that's being kind of decent to a fellow," he said, joyously. "I knew you couldn't keep on being so awfully hard; it isn't your nature. Do you often come for a stroll here?"

"Sometimes. We can get breath here; and often I walk along past the Infirmary windows just to convince myself how many people are worse off than I am. You go there to be taught, do you not? Does it not make you very sad?"

"Oh, well, sometimes," replied Brebner,

telling an unblushing falsehood. "Only, you see, the poor beggars who come there to be treated don't feel quite the same as us."

"What reason have you for supposing they feel different?" inquired Magdalen, calmly. "I suppose they are human beings."

"Oh, well, yes, of course; but do you think the lower orders feel as we do?"

Magdalen turned her head and regarded him with a good deal of quiet contempt, but said nothing. Brebner felt vaguely that he had put his foot in it again. As they passed the middle Meadow Walk, a great throng of students came pouring down from the University and the Infirmary. Several recognised Brebner, and looked, not without curiosity, at his companion. Among others Tom Gilruth observed them; and Magdalen felt herself blushing painfully as she met his glance—one of direct and simple wonder, not unmixed with something else one could not define, but which she felt in her inmost soul. Brebner also perceived the odd expression in Gilruth's face, and it made him savage.

"What does the duffer mean, looking at us with eyes like an owl in a barn at midnight? He hasn't the manners of a costermonger. I won't let him off with it. Didn't even lift his hat till we were past. Boor, that he is."

"Mr. Gilruth is always a gentleman," retorted Magdalen, quickly. "I shall be much obliged if you will let me go home

alone, Mr. Brebner. I did not wish you to come, but you insisted on it."

Brebner looked put out, and even flushed angrily, but paid no manner of heed to the request. He was really very confident that he had made an impression on her heart, and he had hitherto found a lordly and masterful air to be very successful with her sex.

"Oh, come, now, don't be cruel!" he said, with a slight accent of familiarity, which made the girl's cheeks flame. "I'm not going to be treated like that when I've done nothing to deserve it."

"It is not gentlemanly to force your company on one who does not desire it," said Magdalen, looking at him straight. "Will you persecute me outside as well as in the house?"

"By Jove, that's strong language," said Brebner, looking at her with open admiration, for the air of indignation suited her splendidly. "It's too bad, Magdalen, to call it persecution, when you know I love you. Why, I'll marry you to-morrow if you like, and your aunt knows it."

"But I don't want to marry you to-morrow nor any other time, and if you will continue to speak so at every opportunity what am I to do? It is impossible I can remain under my aunt's roof. Would you be so selfish as to drive me away from my home?"

"Oh, too bad!" quoth Brebner, pulling his moustache dolefully, and leaning rather disconsolately against the trunk of an old tree, through whose naked branches the

faint light of a young moon was beginning to steal. They were quite alone on the path, the throng having passed. Magdalen felt uncomfortable and very angry indeed with the foolish lad who had tormented her with his foolish talk. The despondent attitude suited him well, and his Highland cloak, thrown back on his shoulders, gave him quite a picturesque appearance, which many pretty damsels had admired; but Magdalen regarded him with anything but favour. The glance of Tom's eye—sorrowful, wondering, reproachful—almost haunted her yet.

"Then you won't believe that I love you?" he began again, at which aggravating repetition Magdalen gave her foot just a little stamp.

"I don't care whether it's true or not! I don't want to hear it, and I am going home now, so good-evening to you," she said, quite sharply. Then Prebner gathered himself together, and raised his hat.

"I beg your pardon. I shall not offend you again," he said, politely. "If you will allow me to walk back with you I'll be as good as gold. So it's Gilruth that holds the winning card?"

Magdalen threw up her head, and flashed upon him one of her lightning glances. Then she swept past him, and turned into the first opening; and somehow he dared not follow her.

Like a child disappointed in a plaything, he brooded over an imaginary wrong until his hot Southern blood was up, and his

handsome, debonair face became disfigured by evil rage.

Underneath that gay and winning exterior there lay a vindictive and selfish heart which could brook no contradiction or disappointment.

Magdalen paid dearly for that evening walk behind the Infirmary walls.

CHAPTER X.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

"SO you won't come, old fellow, even for a day?"

Frank Stormont was kneeling above a very fat portmanteau on the sitting-room floor, trying to close it, his fair face very red with the exertion. It was breaking-up day, the beginning of the last week in December.

"No, thank you, Frank. Some day, when things are brighter, I will come. Give them all my compliments, and specially thank your mother for her kind invitation."

By a tremendous effort, Frank managed to make the key click in the lock, and rose to his feet triumphant.

"I must say, Tom, after all due respect to you, that you are an ass," he said, calmly, "to sit grinding here when you might be having a jolly good time. Why won't you come?"

"Oh, you know the reason well enough; my father expects me to grind on here. I could go home if I liked, of course; but of two evils I choose the least."

"It'll be awfully slow for you here, poor old boy," said Frank, with genuine concern and sympathy; and I don't believe you'll read a line."

"Yes, I will. I say, Frank, Brebner's not going out of town at all."

Frank whistled.

"What's the meaning of that? Sweet on the Princess, eh?"

By that aristocratic title had Frank christened Magdalen—not, however, out of any disrespect. In his happy home, Frank had been taught to think highly of womanhood, and never from his lips fell those slighting references to women which are thought, by some empty-headed youths, to be smart and clever.

"I believe so," said Tom, with a grave nod. "Do you think it'll come to anything?"

"Shouldn't think it. He's such an awful waster! I can't imagine a girl like Miss Grey having anything to say to him. But, I say, the buffer really seems to be working just now."

Frank was very slangy, it must be admitted, never using a decorous word if another one would do. It must be granted that he was shamefully encouraged in it by his sisters, to whom the college slang sounded beautiful, though they did not venture to use it themselves.

From such expressions Tom was singularly free. Frank sometimes wished him a trifle less staid and proper in speech and behaviour.

"Well, you can stay here and watch the comedy. Mind you report, old fellow, and

don't go spooning yourself on the sly when I'm not here to look after you. Mind, I've set my heart on a marriage between you and our Kate; so please to consider yourself as ticketed 'engaged.'"

So Frank and his happy nonsense took themselves off, and Tom found the silence of the little sitting-room a trifle oppressive after he was gone. He had difficulty, indeed, in fixing his attention on his reading, and at last, in sheer despair, he took himself off for a walk. Seldom had he felt the singular loneliness and isolation of his life so oppressive, or the yearning for a home, where the best impulses of his nature would not be curbed and stunted, so hard to bear.

He took a long walk to the base of the Pentlands, and returned to his lodging about nine o'clock as hungry as a hawk, and in a better frame of mind. There is nothing like the fresh, free wind of heaven for blowing the cobwebs from the brain, and giving healthy thoughts instead of morbid thoughts. He was just taking off his boots at the fireside when the low tap, which somehow made his heart beat a little faster, came to the door.

No words, save a commonplace greeting, had passed between him and Magdalen Grey since the day of Brebner's return from the hunting party. Nevertheless, there was established between these two a kind of silent, subtle understanding and sympathy of which each was vaguely conscious—an interest in the other's concerns which would scarcely be admitted. Tom looked at her as

he bade her good-evening—noting the exquisite neatness of her appearance; the grace of her movements; the quiet, womanly sweetness of her face; and again marvelled at the harshness of Destiny which decreed that so fine a creature should be reduced to such a menial post. But he was compelled to admit that in the hands of Magdalen Grey even such poor labour became a glorious thing, being honourable in its performance. She came into the room quietly and unostentatiously, seemingly unconscious that the occupant was specially interested in her, or regarded her with a great compassion which made his manly heart long to give to her a happier lot. Yes; it had got to that stage already with poor Tom. Some subtle similarity in the circumstances which made life seem somewhat hard at times to her as well as to him had awakened in him a chivalrous desire which came perilously near to love.

"I suppose we shall have a very uninteresting Christmas Day to-morrow, Miss Magdalen," he said, longing to hear her say something more than the mere conventional greeting which passed between them twice or thrice a day.

"It will not make much difference to us in this house," Magdalen answered. "Are you not going home?"

"No, we don't keep Christmas there nor anything else," Tom answered, betrayed into a momentary bitterness which caused Magdalen to regard him with much interest. She had indeed many times wondered what

manner of home relations this grave, rather sad-faced, young man possessed. She forgot her usual reticence, and lingered a moment by the table to ask a question he was by no means loth to answer.

"Is your home far away?"

"Not so very far; about eight miles from Moffat. Do you know that part of Scotland at all?"

"I have been at Moffat with my father once when he was ill. It's a lovely part of the country. I was born in Glasgow."

"So your aunt told me. How is she, to-night? She complained a little yesterday. I hope she is better to-day?"

"She says she is, but I don't think her looking well. You will miss Mr. Stormont. How very bright he is, always whistling and singing about the house!'

"Yes, he is a very jolly fellow, Frank. Mr. Brebner is to remain in town, I suppose, for the holidays?"

Tom could not help regarding Magdalen with some keenness, and she felt annoyed that her colour should immediately rise.

"I believe so; he has told my aunt that. I do not know," she said, with considerable emphasis in the last sentence.

"I thought you and he were great friends?" said Tom, a trifle drily.

"Indeed, we are not. I have only once spoken to him since that day you saw us in the Meadow Walk, and I have often wished to tell you that it was quite by accident we met that day—at least, not quite by accident," she added, very con-

fusedly—"because he followed me. I didn't wish to walk with him, and I have always wanted to tell you, though I am sure I don't know why I should care anything about it."

The direct and simple candour with which she spoke made entire havoc of the remainder of Tom's heart.

"I'm awfully glad you've told me this, though I'm sure I don't know why I should care either," he said, with rather an embarrassed laugh. "Only I know I do care awfully. It's mean, I know, to speak ill of another fellow, but Brebner isn't thought much of. He's a good sort in some respects, but—but—there—I'm putting my foot in it all round!"

"Oh no, you're not," replied Magdalen, calmly. "And I know very well what sort he is. But you have not told me yet why you don't go home to spend Christmas, as everybody does when they have a home within reach. Is your mother alive?"

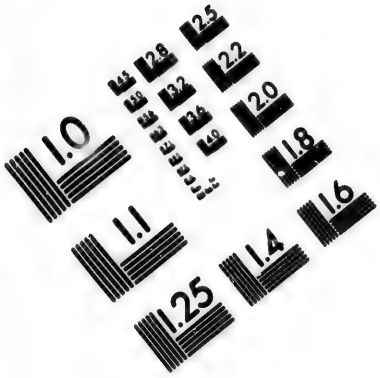
"No, dead since I was sixteen. There's only my father, and he doesn't approve of sentimental observances of any kind. He didn't say I was not to come home; but hinted that it might be as much to my advantage to remain in town and grind, which, as you will observe, I am dutifully doing."

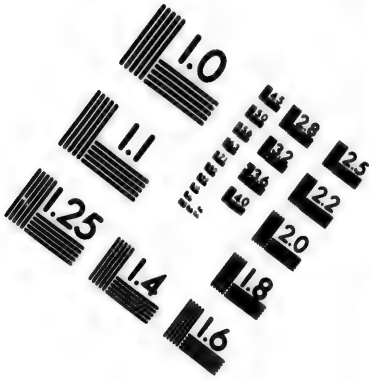
"Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"No; I have the misfortune to be an only child."

"So have I."

They were silent a moment; then Mag-





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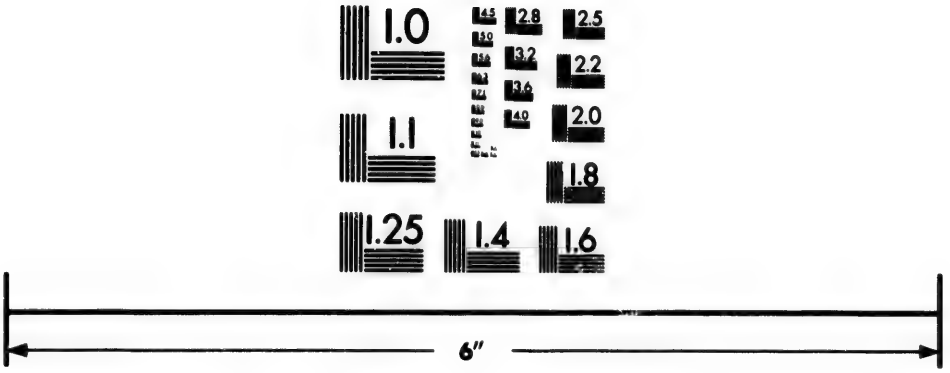

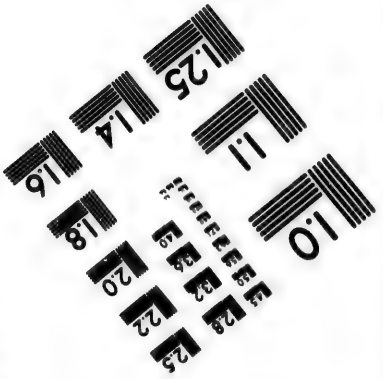

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dalen, suddenly remembering her position, and that she was doing the very thing she had sternly determined never to do, turned rather hastily to leave the room.

"Oh, please, don't go away yet," pleaded Tom. "If you only knew what it is to me to have somebody to talk to—somebody who understands and is sympathetic. I have never had a sister."

Tom was indeed far gone when he ventured upon the presumption that she might be a sister to him. Magdalen, however, did not resent it, but only smiled a pleasant smile.

"My aunt will think I have taken leave of my senses. Is she not very droll, and her Scotch humour so dry? Do you know she calls you all her 'de'ils o' laddies'? But I am sure she has a genuine affection for you. Do tell me more about your father. Is he a minister?"

"Why do you ask that?" queried Tom, interestedly.

"Oh, I thought he might be. I knew a minister 'who was fearfully strict with his daughter. She was at school with me, and she seemed afraid to laugh or be happy."

"No, he is only a doctor—a very clever one, too; the best surgeon in the south of Scotland."

"And isn't he very proud of you? My aunt has told me how clever you are, and even one day, when you were out, showed me your medals."

Tom blushed—actually blushed, great

honest fellow that he was—under the very friendly, interested glance of these big grey eyes.

"Indeed, I assure you he thinks I have done no more than my duty, and I don't suppose I have."

"It is a pity your mother died. Mothers are different, they say, though I hardly remember mine. Never mind, he will be proud of you some day; he will show it to you when you least expect it. That is how some fathers, especially Scotch ones, do. But I think it's a shame for you not to go home for Christmas. Perhaps he is, as proud as you, longing for you to come though he won't say it."

This was an entirely new view of the case, one which had not hitherto been presented to the mind of Tom. The idea of his grim, stern, undemonstrative parent feeling his Christmas lonely and longing for his son rather diverted him, that was all. It never occurred to him for a moment that it might be the case.

"You don't know him, Miss Magdalen. He has pride enough, but I don't think he uses it to hide his feelings, for the simple reason that there are no feelings to hide. At least, I have never seen them."

"They may be there all the same," Magdalen ventured to assert. "I used to think my aunt a person without sentiment or feeling, and I have discovered that she is full of it, just full of it; only it is so deep down it takes a long time to reach it. I am quite sure it is the same with your father.

Now I must go; but I do wish you would go home even yet for Christmas."

"Are you so anxious to get rid of me?" asked Tom, rather reproachfully. Magdalen reddened ever so slightly and shook her head.

"It can't make much difference to me whether you go or stay," she said, a trifle coldly, and with these words left the room. Now, though they were nothing but simple truths, Tom elected to feel rather hurt by them, thinking she might feel what an immense difference her presence made to him. Who so unreasonable as a young man in love for the first time?

He was sitting by the fire about midnight, thinking and dreaming of many possibilities which had not hitherto occurred to him, at least in relation to his own life, when he heard a hurried foot across the little hall, and then a quick knock at his door. In a moment he had opened it himself, and beheld Magdalen standing in a flowing dressing-gown, with her abundant hair unbound and lying on her shoulders like a flood; her face pale, and a vague terror in her eyes.

"Oh! Mr. Gilruth, would you please to come? My aunt is very ill; she seems to have taken a fit. She looks as if she was dying."

Tom never spoke, but immediately followed her into the old lady's room. His experience, though not great, was sufficient to tell him at once that it was a fatal seizure. Death, indeed, was stamped on

Miss Euphame's face. In the extremity of her keen distress Magdalen laid her hand on his arm, and the look she cast upon him was one of mingled questioning and trust. It touched him inexpressibly.

"She's dying," he said, in a low voice. "Shall I go for a doctor? I fear it will do little good."

"No, don't go: if she is dying, there is no need."

She knelt down by the bed, and folded her two hands across the withered, toil-worn one of her aunt. The look of love—grateful, tender love—on the girl's face seemed to stir some emotion in the faintly-throbbing heart. She strove to turn her head, and her lips essayed speech, but in vain. It was the last effort. Her eyes then dwelt with a curious, imploring look on Tom's face, until the film of death blotted it from her sight. Gently, imperceptibly almost, without a sigh or a struggle, she passed away. Miss Euphame had done her last for her lodgers. Her haggling days were over.

CHAPTER XI.

"THAT NEW WORLD WHICH IS THE OLD."

"ANSWER Mr. Gilruth's bell, Katie," said Magdalen to the Crater, who instantly flew off in mad haste. That shrewd and observant young person, to whom the sudden and solemn event of the week might be fraught with consequences the most serious, was greatly exercised by the behaviour of "Miss Mad'len" since her aunt's death. Brebner had taken himself off to Lanark the day after, the atmosphere of a house of mourning not being congenial to him. Tom remained. It was highly unconventional, of course—indeed quite improper; but when Magdalen asked him to stay, with that peculiar, wistful expression in her pathetic eyes, Tom would have risked much worse contingencies than the adverse criticisms of Dame Grundy. That afternoon, Miss Euphame, mourned but by few, had been laid to rest in the Old Calton burying-ground, and now it remained to be seen what the desolate girl could do to keep the wolf from the door. Magdalen gave her order with some sharpness to the

"OH! MR. GILRUTH, WOULD YOU PLEASE TO COME. MY AUNT IS VERY ILL" (*p.* 94).

Crater; but that faithful soul had no thought of resentment as she flew to obey. She knew, by the peculiarly haggard look on the face of her now adored and only mistress, that she was suffering keenly. At such times the Crater had no alloy of self in her being.

"Please'm, Mr. Gilruth's compliments, an' would you speak a minute?" was the message she brought back. Magdalen went without hesitation. She knocked at the door as usual, and Mr. Gilruth must have been quite near it, for he opened it for her before she had time to enter.

"Good-morning. I have scarcely seen you to-day," he said, kindly. "I hope you are better."

"Yes, thank you, I am quite well. I am able to think to-day," she answered, with a faint smile.

"Could you leave the Crater in the house alone, do you think?" he asked, using Frank's nickname without a smile, because it was so familiar.

"Why?" she asked, in surprise.

"Because I want you to go out with me."

"With you? Where?"

"Into the open air. You have not crossed the threshold for three days. I have a great many things to say to you, and I fancy we could talk better in the open air."

Again that faint, sweet bloom stole to her cheek, and she turned from him without a word, and dressed herself for her walk. She had a strange, passive feeling, as if she was being led along some road, the end of

which she could not see. But she had no fear or anxiety concerning it, so long as she was by the side of the man who was waiting for her. It had come to this already between these two! Truly, love owns no precedent, is guided by no rule. She gave her orders to the Crater, and stepped out into the dark little lobby, to find Tom waiting for her, with his ulster on and hat in hand. They went downstairs in silence, and out into the clear, bright, beautiful air of the wintry afternoon.

"Oh, how delicious!" Magdalen said, as she felt its keen touch on her face.

"Yes; it will do you good. Can you walk well? Would it be too far to go to Blackford Hill? We can take the byways and cut off the corners."

"I should like it. I am never tired," she answered, simply; and they turned their steps straight across the green meadows towards the south. They talked, as they went, of commonplace things in a commonplace way, with no embarrassment or restraint, though each knew that they would by-and-by approach themes which it would be difficult to discuss in a commonplace way. They found the byways very quiet and unfrequented, and as they left the city behind, felt the air grow rarer and more keen, while the hoar-frost glittered on every blade of grass and every leafless bough.

"How delightful it all is! I have never had a walk like this since I came to Edinburgh, and had no idea that the suburbs were so lovely."

"I suppose they are," Tom said, a trifle absently though; he was looking at her fixedly, thinking what a beautiful woman she was. She was well dressed; the mourning she had bought for her father had been of the best, and the sombre material and hue suited her rare, pale face, and made her figure look taller and more graceful. Tom himself was no unhandsome fellow, with his substantial figure and his manly, pleasant, trustworthy face. To outward appearance they were a well-matched pair, and were taken, more than once that afternoon, for interesting and happy lovers.

The sun was setting when they had climbed to the brow of the hill, and they stood still a moment in silence and looked upon the picture made by the lovely city, with its foreground of shining sea, upon which the red light of the sunset had fullest play.

"Shall we sit down here for a few minutes on this rocky ledge?" suggested Tom. "I am afraid you are tired. And we need not sit long enough to chill you."

Magdalen said nothing, but sat down with a curious tremulous droop of the lips. She had not been so cared for since the days when her father's love had sheltered her, and they seemed very far away.

"Now we can talk. This is just the place for it," Tom said, quietly, and he sat down where he could see her face, and looked at her in his honest, kindly way. "Our friendship has been very short, but somehow it seems like a very old friendship.

I want to hear what you think of doing with your life—if you have thought about it at all."

"I have thought about it, but only to-day," Magdalen replied, "and I have no sort of idea what I am going to do."

She spoke gravely and quietly, without any touch of complaining or of distress. She was still possessed, indeed, of that strange certainty that the ordering of her life was about to be taken out of her hands, and she waited for it. But she did not know what was to be the manner of the ordering. That did not seem to trouble her at all.

"Your aunt, I suppose," said Tom, with a slight hesitation—"your aunt has not left very much?"

"There is nothing," she replied, quite quietly, "except three pounds and four shillings. I counted it this morning."

"And you have no other relatives—nobody who can take any interest in your welfare?"

"I have a grandfather in Glasgow—my mother's father—but he will have nothing to do with me. He told me so the day my father died. He advised me to go to service."

"The brute!"

A swift, momentary smile darted to the girl's grave lips.

"That is just what I called him in my own mind. Very improper, wasn't it? He is a horrible old man, so respectable and religious! Of course it hurt his fine feelings to have his son-in-law do what papa did. Do you think it very odd that I cannot blame

papa very much? Of course he did very wrong, and I fear my sympathy shows that I have no proper conception of right and wrong. My grandfather told me so, and he is a very good man, an elder in the Church, and ought to know."

Tom felt her sarcasm to be very keen. He saw her lips curl and her grey eyes flash. Her face was no longer passive. It revealed something of the soul.

"You see, I had nothing to do with it at all. What was of consequence to me was that I had the best and dearest father in the world, and so I will uphold him in the face of the whole world," she said, with a strange mixture of passion and exquisite tenderness. "How strange of me to talk so to you! Pray excuse me. You have been so good. I shall never forget it."

She brought her large, calm eyes to bear on his face, and that grateful, unembarrassed look somewhat disconcerted him, he could not tell why. He got up suddenly, and took a few steps across the turf.

"And you have no sort of idea what you are going to do? You must think about it very seriously this very day, Miss Grey."

"I have tried to, but it is no use. I counted the money, and estimated how long it would last. It will keep Katie and me, with strict economy, for about a month."

"And then?"

"Perhaps by that time I may have thought to some purpose. It did occur to me yesterday, when I saw the Infirmary, that I might be a nurse. But I am not at all

sympathetic. I am afraid I don't like sick people, though I believe I could give myself up utterly to care for any one I loved. My grandfather would love to hear me say that, Mr. Gilruth; it would bear out his opinion of me. I assure you he thinks I am a most improper young person, because I shut him up absolutely when he spoke about papa. I don't remember quite what I said, but I know I felt as if I could have killed him. I feel different now. I pity him. He is a poor, mean creature, who tries to make the best of both worlds, but keeps his keenest eye very much on this side of the grave. Are you quite shocked at me, Mr. Gilruth?"

"No; I was only thinking of how you have moved about among us all these weeks, and what it must have cost you."

"It cost me a good deal, I confess; but I was bound to do it—to crucify the flesh, as my grandfather put it, though I wouldn't for worlds he should know I remembered a word he said. He told me I should get a judgment on my pride."

Tom stepped quickly in front of her, and looked at her in a curious, protecting kind of way, almost as he might have regarded a child.

"I must bring you back to the practical question, Miss Magdalen. It is what I brought you out to speak of. Of course, you know you can't keep on the house and continue your aunt's way of life?"

"I suppose not. I know it." Again the hard, sad look returned to her face.

"The thought of your desolate condition

is intolerable to me. You are quite unfit to battle for yourself—you have had no preparation for it. Will you let me take care of you?"

The question was put in a perfectly matter-of-fact way, though his voice changed with his last words. Magdalen loo ed up at him in simple wonder.

"I am not sure that I understand you," she said, "though I know you are in earnest.'

"I am. Will you be my wife?"

She sprang up, and her pale face became suffused with crimson.

"Your wife!"

She looked straight at him, and he did not falter or waver under that intense questioning.

"I have learned to love you in these three days, Magdalen—at least, I have learned to discern the love which existed before. I have nothing to offer you except that love; but it is at least honest and sincere."

"Oh, what are you saying?" she cried, piteously. "You are a young man with life all before you. You would hamper yourself at its very outset because your honest heart pities me. I could not accept so great a sacrifice, even from my friend."

"It is no sacrifice. It will give me a life's happiness, Magdalen," he said, and took a step nearer to her. And she—she was very desolate on the face of the earth, and in her heart there was an answering thrill which responded to his pleading. She accepted the love he offered, and they walked home

together under the wintry stars as if they had received a new lease of life. Their path was beset with difficulties—with what, to some, would have seemed unsurmountable obstacles. But what cared they? When did love shrink before the bearing of life's burdens?—when did youth believe it could not prevail? Within the week they were married, and the little world which had knowledge of them only shook its head, and said, as it went by, "Two fools!"

CHAPTER XII.

TRAITOR.

NOW, though Brebner was spending his Christmas in a fine old country house among the Lanark hills—a house where there were pretty girls and gay young fellows like himself, dancing parties and skating parties, and even private theatricals, to enliven the time, his thoughts continued to revert with most annoying persistence to the dingy house in Keir Street, and he could get no peace of mind for wondering what was to become of the girl who had stirred his careless heart as not one of the attractive damsels beside him could do. On the morning of the fourth day, when he thought sufficient time had elapsed to have all the funeral and other depressing arrangements over, Brebner took a run into town, ostensibly to bring out some things from his lodgings he had forgotten to provide himself with. He arrived at the house about noon, and, not having his latch-key, had to ring for admittance. The Crater, in an unprecedented condition of excitement and untidiness, her wiry black locks standing round

her small face in quite an aggressive manner, grinned from ear to ear at sight of the familiar occupant of the back parlour, who had always been, in spite of his erratic habits, a great favourite of hers. He had always been subject to fits of generosity after having bullied her more than usual, and had once presented her with a whole sovereign—a circumstance never to be forgotten by the Crater, to whom even gifts came but seldom.

"Good-morning, Blackamoor," he said, familiarly. "I may come in, I suppose? Miss Grey in?"

"No, there isn't no Miss Grey now," said the Crater, and Brebner could not help thinking it rather a heartless way to speak of the departed spinster.

"You needn't grin like a rat over it, Kate," he said, reprovingly. "Is Miss Magdalen in? Of course I meant her."

"There isn't no Miss Magdalen neither," said the Crater, with an ecstatic smile, which puzzled and irritated Brebner not a little.

"What do you mean, you imp? Shut the door and tell me."

He shut the door himself as he spoke, and stalked into his own room, which was very neat and tidy, followed, at a respectful distance, by the Crater.

"The house is awfully quiet, surely. Is there nobody in but you?"

"Nobody—nor won't be till night," said the Crater at once.

"Where are they all? Is Mr. Gilruth away?"

"Yes."

"Home for New Year after all—eh?"

The Crater was not communicative. She pursed up her lips and half closed one eye, thus giving to her face a decidedly impish look.

"Can't you speak, Curmudgeon?" queried Brebner, whose repertoire of epithets for the Crater was extensive. "Where's your mistress?—at least, I suppose she's your mistress now? I mean Miss Magdalen. If she's in, kindly ask her to speak to me for a moment. If she isn't, perhaps you can collect yourself sufficiently to inform me when she is likely to return."

"They're coming back the night," said the Crater then, with the same ecstatic and enigmatical grin.

"Who's they?"

"Mr. Gilruth an' Miss Mad'len; they've got married, an' they're coming back the night."

"The deuce they have? Oh, nonsense, Blackamoor! you're romancing," quoth Brebner, though his face assumed a peculiar paleness, which indicated that he had received a shock.

"It's true," said the Crater, with a sage nod. "They got married yesterday, and they're coming hame the nicht, an' I have a lot to dae. I want the place like a new preen for them."

She said this with a distinctly aggrieved air, intended to convey the reproach that her valuable time was being encroached upon. But the hint was altogether lost on

Brebner, who stood by the table with a puzzled and rather confused look on his face.

"Married! Oh, I say, I can't believe it! Yesterday, did you say? And has Gilruth been in the house all the time?"

Brebner was not above questioning the little servant maid. In some instances he sadly lacked the instincts of a gentleman. But perhaps there was an excuse for him in this case.

"He was here till Tuesday nicht; then he went to a hotel, I think. But they're comin' back the nicht."

"Where have they been, do you know? at Moffat?" he queried, with interest. The "Crater" shook her head.

"I dinna ken; but I ken it's no there. They're gaun efter they hear from Doctor Gilruth—I ken that."

The Crater did not say how she knew, nor did she realise that she was in any sense betraying a trust. She was, in the main, a guileless creature, unsuspecting of evil. Had she dreamed of the consequences of that brief colloquy in the back sitting-room, she would have hermetically sealed her communicative mouth. The Crater knew nothing of under-currents. Her joyous elation and excitement over such a tremendous event as a wedding she was willing to share with one who seemed interested. And she had been obliged to bottle up her feelings for two days. Brebner, of course, she regarded as a friend of the family.

"Well, I must say they've lost no time,"

he said then. "Bring me a glass of beer to drink their healths in, Blackamoor, and never mind the change."

He tossed her a half-sovereign, and dropped his head on his arms, suffering, for a moment, as keenly as it was possible for him to suffer. He *was* attached to Magdalen Grey, and she, had she reciprocated his feelings, might have moulded him into a better man. But she had never been more than slightly interested in him, and he had no reason to feel himself aggrieved. He was more than aggrieved—indeed, he was savage and vindictive, deluding himself into the idea that he had been treacherously and shamefully treated. The spoiled child did not fail to do credit to his training. It was not possible for him to accept his disappointment with a man's courage, or for his selfish heart to rejoice in the happiness of others. It would take much of the hardest discipline of life to work that miracle, if, indeed, it was ever accomplished. There are some upon whom such discipline has no wholesome effect, but rather the reverse.

When the Crater returned with the beer she found the tenant of the back parlour busy at his drawers, apparently ransacking among his books and papers.

"Thank you, Blackamoor, you needn't stay. When Mr. and Mrs. Gilruth return you can give them my compliments, and tell them I'm at Meggatlaw, Abington, if they want to write. You'll never remember that, of course, so I'll write it down; and as I don't suppose they'll be going to keep lodgers any

longer, I'll send for my stuff any day it's convenient for them. Can you remember all that?"

"I'll try," said the Crater, regarding him with an air of wistful regret. Half-sovereigns did not grow on every bush. She was not entirely sordid, but money possessed for her all the charm it ever possesses for those who handle it but seldom.

"And I wish you joy of your new master and missus, Blackamoor. They'll have you transformed into a smart slavey, perhaps, next time I come back. Good-bye, and good luck to you and to them. Pray don't forget to offer them my sincere congratulations."

The Crater, from some unexplained and deep-seated reason, felt uncomfortable after his departure, and set less blithely to work for the great home-coming. She had a vague feeling that something had gone wrong, and it made her small head ache trying to solve the problem. She wished, with all her soul, that Brebner had not come back, and felt that his congratulations were not sincere. But as the day wore on, and the joyfully anticipated hour approached, the uncomfortable memory grew somewhat dim, and she was ready with a radiant and highly polished countenance to welcome her master and mistress on their return. Brebner took a cab from Tollcross to the Caledonian Station, and thence an express train for Moffat, gliding past Abington as if he had no interest in the place, though afternoon tea was languishing in the wide,

quaint hall of Meggatlaw, waiting the lad who had been all the week the life and soul of that merry band.

The short winter afternoon had waned when the train steamed into Moffat Station. Brebner was familiar with the little town, and knew at once where to apply for the vehicle necessary for his conveyance to the neighbouring village, where Martin Gilruth practised his profession.

In some respects Brebner was as small-minded as the veriest village gossip, and, on a recent visit to Moffat, he had made it his business to inquire into every circumstance of Tom Gilruth's upbringing and surroundings. He had no need, therefore, to make any inquiries regarding the place, but gave his order at once to be driven to Gilmanscleugh. It was a fine, mild evening, the frost having giving way in that sheltered valley; the air, as they drove rapidly along the sodden roads, had scarcely a touch of winter chill in it. Brebner conversed affably with the driver all the way, drawing him on to talk of the folk lore of the place, partly to pass the time, but chiefly to keep himself from dwelling upon the treacherous act he was about to commit—the betrayal of a friend. It was about six o'clock when they came within sight of the twinkling lights and irregular roofs of the picturesque hamlet, the centre of the wide district in which Tom's father and his grandfather before him had practised so long.

The doctor's house, a solid, square, imposing-looking structure, stood back from

the village street, separated from it by a row of rugged old elm trees, through which the scant moonbeams played, casting the weird shadow of each leafless branch across the little lawn. Bidding the driver go to the inn and refresh himself for half an hour, Brebner passed through the open gate, and gave the bell a pull, which sent a deep, loud echo resounding through the quietness of the house.

"Can I see Dr. Gilruth?" he asked the maid who answered his summons.

"Yes, sir. He's at dinner. Will you step in, sir, and I'll tell him?"

Brebner stepped in, glancing with some surprise round the handsome hall, in which were evidences not only of means, but of a correct, if rather severe, taste. The consulting-room, into which he was shown, would have done no discredit to the abode of a great city physician. Books lined the walls from ceiling to floor, except where, in some little niche, a rare bronze, or fine picture, relieved the monotony; a rich Turkey carpet covered the floor; and the appointments of the writing-table were solid silver, richly chased. Brebner thought of Tom grubbing along in second-rate lodgings, scarcely allowed decent pocket-money, and stared round with increased surprise. Well, the pride of Martin Gilruth, M.D., was about to sustain a severe blow, and Brebner had enough of mischief in him to enjoy giving it. He half forgot that his errand was to wreak vengeance on Tom and on the woman who he imagined had slighted him. He was

allowed ample time to collect his thoughts. Scarcely for death itself would Dr. Gilruth hurry his dinner, which, it must be said, he always earned by a hard day's work. This period of waiting was trying to Brebner, and had there been any decent means of escape, he would probably have availed himself thereof; but at length the door opened, and the old gentleman, very stately and handsome and imposing-looking, gave him a dignified good-evening.

Brebner was not devoid of that sometimes useful quality vulgarly known as "cheek"; nevertheless, he felt somewhat disconcerted as those grave, stern, penetrating eyes fixed him with an inquiring gaze.

"Good-evening. What can I do for you, Mr. —— ?"

"Brebner is my name," replied the young man, a trifle embarrassedly. "I came over from Moffat this evening."

"To consult me?" queried the doctor, standing before the fire, with his hands clasped behind him.

"Not exactly. I am a friend of your son Tom; we lodged in the same house. Has he never mentioned my name to you?"

"He has not," replied the doctor, with no symptom of unbending; indeed, he appeared to regard the youth with special disfavour after this announcement.

"I thought I'd like to come over, half expecting to find Tom and his wife here," he said, uttering that base falsehood with unblushing front. "Are they here, or do you expect them soon?"

"Who?"

The old doctor, was, as a rule, master of himself, but he gave one little start of surprise while the young man was speaking.

"Tom and his wife; they were married yesterday, and I thought they might be here."

"Are you speaking of my son, may I ask?"

"Yes; of Tom. He was married yesterday."

"I have not heard of it. Who is the lady?"

He spoke with admirable calmness, but a curious yellowish tinge overspread his ruddy face.

"Well, as it was a sort of runaway affair, quite after the Gretna style, perhaps it is no wonder you did not hear of it," said Brebner, airily.

The old doctor never took his eyes from the young man's face, and Brebner began to feel what a terrible organ the human eye can be when it is made to express certain sentiments of the human soul.

"Who is the lady, may I ask?—if this extraordinary tale is true?"

"A most charming lady, I do assure you, far above her position in looks and everything; only our landlady's niece—but still a lady, I do assure you—just the sort of girl anybody would risk a lot for. Tom is a lucky dog—the envy of two or three of us."

"And, pray, how long has this interesting affair, which has culminated so successfully,

been going on?" inquired the doctor, in a dead, calm voice, which misled Brebner completely. He began to think the object of his mission, to make a breach, for the time being, at least, between his successful rival and his father, was likely to be defeated.

"Oh, well, it's been going on for a time. Since ever she came, I suppose there's been love-making going on in the background. Mrs. Gilruth was rather a flirt. She carried us all on a little bit for her own amusement, keeping Tom all the time as the serious string to her bow. But then the landlady died. Stormont and I, of course, cleared out then, and Tom stayed on, and I suppose they thought the only way to propitiate the proprieties was to get married. But I've no doubt Tom will explain it all satisfactorily when they come."

Brebner had slightly overstepped the mark, and he realised it fully next moment. The colour, a shade more fiery, rushed back like a flood to the old gentleman's face, and his eyes blazed upon the unfortunate youth in a lightning flash.

"Curse him, and you, too," he roared. "Get out of my sight"—which Brebner did with the speed of lightning. The interview had not been long, nor particularly amicable. Nevertheless, the mischief was done. As Brebner himself would have expressed it, he had put an effectual spoke in poor Tom's wheel.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER.

"WELL, Magdalen, I have written to my father to prepare him, and we'll start for Gilmanscleugh to-morrow."

Tom spoke cheerfully to his young wife, and she looked up at him with an answering smile. They had been married a week, and were beginning to descend again to the affairs of the sublunary world. It was not the first time, however, that Tom had thought of his proud old father, and it was with no small trepidation that he contemplated a meeting with him. Although prepared to defend his action regarding Magdalen Grey before the whole world, he did not care to dwell very much upon his father's probable reception of the news. Even in his mildest mood he was likely to condemn such a hasty and imprudent marriage. Tom did not dare to think what would be his verdict in the heat of passion. He had tried to prepare his wife gently not to expect too much from his father, and was glad to see that she did not appear to be concerning herself about him

at all. Truth to tell, Magdalen had not, as yet, given much serious thought to the circumstances or consequences of her sudden marriage. She only knew that she was unspeakably happy; that her heart rested upon her husband as upon a stable rock; that she had found one who did not misunderstand her, who loved her dearly enough to be gentle with her most wayward moods. She had come out of the wilderness into a sunny and goodly land; it need not be wondered at that for the time she could not look beyond. It was the seventeenth of January, and though the classes had been open for a fortnight Tom had not been near the University, nor had Frank Stormont returned to town. Tom had never written to him. He did not even know whether Frank was aware of Miss Euphame's death. It was impossible he could be aware of later events. Sometimes an odd smile crossed Tom's face as he pictured the expression of the incorrigible when he should hear of it. The Crater was still an inmate of the house, and was in silent ecstasies all the time over the new *régime*. She was a romantic young person, given to perusal of the "Penny Reader," and suchlike; therefore it was to be expected the marriage of "Miss Mad'len" was after her own heart. She was a good little soul, who did her duty, according to her meagre light; and Magdalen relied upon her, and gave her many tokens of her trust and friendliness. The time was coming when the Crater repaid these tokens with golden service, when she proved

that, beneath the unlovely exterior, she had a heart a queen might have envied. Tom sealed his letter, kissed his wife, and went out to post it. However, the Crater intercepted him in the lobby with another letter, just delivered by the afternoon postman. He returned to the sitting-room with it in his hand, and when he saw his father's writing, his face paled slightly. But he tore it open with assumed indifference, though he turned his back to Magdalen before he read it. He was so engrossed by it that he was unconscious of any movement until he felt her arm about his neck and her head on his shoulder.

"It is from your father, Tom. Let me read it, too."

He crushed it up in his hand, and she saw that his face was quite white.

"No, my darling, you can't read it. It is for my eye alone."

"But it is about me; I know it is," she said, quietly. "I would rather see it, Tom, if you please."

"Magdalen, I can't let you see it. My father has forgotten himself entirely. He is subject to violent fits of temper, and has evidently written this in one. Believe me, dear, I would not willingly keep anything back from you."

"Tell me what he says then, Tom; I have a right to know."

"He casts me off, Magdalen, that is all," he answered, shortly. "It is quite in the style of the shilling shockers, I assure you. He talks as if he were a grand duke instead

of a country surgeon. So, my darling wife, I have literally nothing more to offer you than my love and the labour of my hands, but I thank God I am able to work for you."

He tossed the letter into the fire, but when he turned again Magdalen was gone. When he went after her, she answered through the locked door of another room that she would come to him by-and-by, but he must leave her alone for a little. It was nearly an hour, and his patience was quite exhausted, before she returned to the sitting-room.

"Tom," she said, and slid down at his feet where he sat, "I have been very wrong and very wicked. I thought of nothing but my selfish happiness. Will you forgive me for letting you make me your wife?"

"Magdalen, hush! Not a word! I will not listen! Not a word!"

"You must, for I will say it some time. I shall never, never forgive myself. I did not think. I forgot how rash and how foolish others would think it. I thought of nothing, Tom, but that you cared for me. I would give my life if I could undo it now."

"Would you?"

He took her face in his two strong hands and looked down into it with love there was no mistaking.

"Yes, I would, though I'm so happy. I have ruined your life and your prospects. But I will go to your father and tell him how it was, and offer to go away into obscurity, and never trouble you any more."

"Until I call in the aid of the law to compel my refractory wife to live with me," he said, smiling, yet with a grave and beautiful tenderness. "Magdalen, you have given yourself to me, and I bless God for the gift. I am happier than I have ever been in my life, and I am not afraid but that, some day, I shall be able to give my wife a position something like what she deserves. Meanwhile, it is we two against the world."

They were brave words, and they broke down the trembling woman beside him. For the first time, she wept on his breast, and so eased her overcharged heart.

By-and-by, when they were less agitated, and had begun to discuss ways and means in an exemplary manner, there came a great ringing at the bell, and then the loud, cheery tones of a familiar voice wishing the Crater a "Happy New Year."

Magdalen sprang up with a face crimson-hued, but before she could escape Frank was in the room.

"Hulloa, old boy—oh, I beg your pardon!" he cried at sight of Magdalen, and glanced from one to the other in comical surprise.

"You've come back to a world of changes, Frank," Tom said, in the easiest possible way. "Let me introduce you to my wife."

Frank sat down helplessly on the nearest chair, and for the space of two minutes did not open his mouth. Of course Magdalen escaped, with a laugh she was unable to suppress. That sweet sound seemed to restore him, and he found his tongue.

"So you've been and gone and done it,

you and the Princess? Well, I'm bound to say, Tommy, you might have done worse, and I wish you luck! Now, please to unravel these mysteries, which are too many for me."

He was soon in possession of the facts, and it was easy to see, from the varying expressions on his face as he listened, how utterly his sympathies were with the young pair.

"And M.D., F.R.C.S. has really cast you off? Heard it accidentally, and the very idea of the landlady's niece sent him into convulsions? Never mind, Tommy, he'll come round. But in the circumstances, what are you going to do?"

"We have just been in committee of ways and means, and we are agreed that, if possible, I must graduate. I can get through my second, and then go out as unqualified *locum tenens* for three months, which will help to pay the needful for the final. It is for my wife's sake. If I can graduate, Frank, it will be all right. It must be managed somehow. I'll work like a galley-slave, and earn money somehow."

"Oh yes; you're bricks, both of you. Mrs. Gilruth looks as if she could do or dare anything. Never fear, you'll take the shine out of M.D., F.R.C.S. yet. What about this establishment?"

"We propose to keep it on if you will stay, and get another fellow to share the rooms. It would all help. It's an awful thing, Frank, for a fellow to think of his wife reduced to keeping boarders, but as we

took a rash step we must abide by the consequences."

"Oh, never mind the consequences; we'll manage the thing somehow," said Frank, with all the cheery confidence of his bright nature. "But, I say, is Brebner here?"

"No, he did not come back—only sent for his traps. He was rather fond of my wife, as you know," said Tom, with a pardonable air of pride, "and I suppose he wouldn't like to see us here. All the same, he needn't avoid me as he does. I met him yesterday, and he wouldn't look at me."

"Poor beggar, he'll get over it," said Frank, indifferently. "How do you suppose your governor got to hear? I don't suppose you put the announcement in the *Scotsman*?"

"Hardly. I have wondered, too, more than once, how the news travelled. I did not think there was a soul in the world took sufficient interest in us to talk about us."

"You're too modest," said Frank, with a laugh. "Yes, it is just about time you showed yourself, Mrs. Gilruth," he added, as Magdalen entered the room. "Won't you shake hands with the friend of the family. I congratulate you on having married the best fellow in the world, except me—at whom you won't even look. I can't think how so quiet a fellow as Tom ever managed it; all in a week, too! I must have him teach me the way!"

Magdalen blushed and laughed, at the same time returning the honest, friendly grip with one as warm and close. In Frank Stormont she knew they had a warm and true friend.

"I'm jolly glad it has happened. All the same, I'm cheated out of my relationship with this old fellow," continued Frank, bringing his happy nonsense to relieve the somewhat emotional tension of the moment. "Of course, you know I had reserved one of my sisters for him; but Fate decreed otherwise. Well, Mrs. Gilruth, are you going to put up with my company? I don't relish the idea of shifting my camp, and I won't; so there!"

"Indeed, it would be rather serious for us if you did shift your camp," returned Magdalen, with a tremulous laugh. "We can't afford to lose you."

A little later in the evening she came to Frank with a somewhat wistful look on her face, which quite touched his soft heart.

"Mr. Stormont," she said, "you know Tom, and you know Tom's father, don't you? Do you think it will take him very long to relent and forgive us?"

"I have not had the felicity of beholding the old gentleman, and I don't want to," replied Frank, pushing back his fair hair with rather an impatient gesture. "He is, if you'll excuse the language, a confounded old ass. If he doesn't relent, let him do the other thing. You'll get along without him and his precious guineas."

"I daresay we shall, somehow; but if my husband's career is spoiled, or even hindered, I shall never forgive myself."

It was the natural misgiving of a loving, unselfish woman's heart.

"It won't; he'll work twice as well with

you. You are just the sort of woman a man would do or dare anything for," replied Frank, in frank admiration, which Magdalen could not resent, it was so sincere and friendly. "And, I say, you and Tom must come up home with me, some day soon, to see my mater and the girls. They're an awful jolly lot, and I know would fall in love with you instanter. They couldn't help it."

Magdalen smiled, cheered by his happy view of the future, which was, nevertheless, full of uncertainty and doubt. Nothing remained, however, for the young couple, whom the world had generously dubbed two fools, but to put their shoulders to the wheel and push up the hill with might and main. Magdalen's love, like that of every true wife, was mingled with ambition for her husband; and the thought that she might in any way be a barrier in the way of his success was so bitter and so intolerable that she dared not allow herself to dwell upon it for a moment. So, in fear and trembling, yet happy withal, the young pair began their battle with the world.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE SHADOW.

THE Crater was walking up and down the kitchen floor crooning a low song to the baby in her arms. There was a change in the Crater—a very great change, of which she was quite unconscious. She was no longer scraggy and stunted, no longer dingy and plain. In twelve months she had shot up from rough, awkward girlhood into young womanhood; the odd-looking little lodging-house slavey, the butt for all the poor wit of the stair, had become transformed into a capable, self-reliant, and self-respecting young woman, fit to serve the best in the land. Another product of environment, do you say? Yes, certainly. Good food, sound sleep, and congenial work were powerful factors in the change; but, perhaps, the most powerful factor of all was the constant companionship of a refined and cultivated woman, whom, as her mistress, she adored. The Crater had, indeed, developed—and was at once the faithful servant and the trusted friend of the little family, whose vicissitudes, during that

eventful year, had not been few. Magdalen's health had not been sustained, and for some months before her baby's birth she had been almost an invalid, only able to direct the guidance of the household from her couch. What the Crater had been, what she had done in that time, was known only to those to whom her willing, unselfish service was a rare gift of Heaven. The Crater had, indeed, many times saved the heart of her mistress from despair. Her face, as she bent it low over the sleeping child, wore an expression of brooding tenderness beautiful to behold. When he was quiet again there stole back to it a look of anxiety and distress, never, in these dark days, long absent from it. The Crater carried the care of that loved household on her faithful head. When the child slept soundly again she laid him down in his cot, which stood by the kitchen fire, and stepped across the little hall to the door of her mistress' room. It was opened at once by Magdalen, whose face was wet with recent tears. It was not the face of the Magdalen of old; its roundness, its freshness were gone, and in their place had come a worn, even a haggard, look. But it was not less beautiful. When Sorrow leaves her mark she gives for compensation that touch of pathos which has a beauty all its own.

"I'm so glad you have been able to keep baby quiet, Katie. The master has fallen asleep. Has Mr. Stormont come in?"

"Yes'm. I've just taken in his dinner."

"And laid baby down. Thank you, Katie.

Oh, my girl, what should I do, what should we all do, without you?"

"Don't, ma'am. I can't bear it," said the Crater, with a great show of anger, which the softness of her eyes belied.

"It is true, Katie. God will reward you. It is certain we never can. Go and sit by Mr. Gilruth while I talk to Mr. Stormont."

The Crater silently nodded, and glided into the sick-room. She crept over to the bed, and, sitting down on the chair her mistress had just left, looked upon her master's wasted face, and silently wept. The sorrow which had come upon the house was the Crater's sorrow likewise, so utterly was she devoted to those who dwelt beneath its roof.

Magdalen looked in for a moment to her sleeping child, and then entered the sitting-room, where Frank was making a pretence of eating his dinner.

"How is he now?" he asked, jumping up to get her a chair. "The Crater says he has slept since the doctor was here."

"Yes, he is asleep now. I wanted to tell you, Frank, that I have sent for Doctor Gilruth. Tom has talked so incessantly of him that I took it upon myself. If he gets well there will be no harm done, and if not——"

She had passed over to the hearth, and now stood with her hand laid on the mantel-shelf. The expression on her face wrung the heart of the honest fellow who looked upon it.

"It has been a little trying for me these

few days, Frank," she said, with a slight, unsteady smile. "He seems to turn from me; and he speaks of his father all the time. I had no idea that he felt the estrangement so much."

Frank perceived that she was overstrung —that the full heart could no longer contain itself.

"Dear Mrs. Gilruth, I entreat you to believe what the doctor explained to you, that it is often so with fever patients," he said in his quick, impulsive way. "Although he speaks of his father in his delirium, it is no proof that he thinks more of him than of you. I—I do assure you, though it is presumptuous of me to say so, Tom has never been happier in his life than during the last twelve months. Why, how jolly we have all been, and will be again, after this confounded fever is a thing of the past."

A quick, dry sob broke from Magdalen's lips.

"I must speak out to you, Frank, because I have no one else, and you have been like a brother to us. It is your goodness which makes you try to reassure me, but—but I think Tom felt it all more keenly than we knew. I do not say he ever regretted his marriage, or wished it undone, but he has not forgotten his father."

"Then he deserves to be forgotten, the mean old curmudgeon!" quoth Frank, hotly. "I only wish I had him for five minutes—I'd make his ears ring. To have a son like Tom, and a daughter-in-law like you; to say nothing of the Incomparable," he added, with a smile at the familiar

appellation he had bestowed on the baby. "Yes, he deserves to be forgotten, and I only hope if Tom ever has the chance he'll not let him off too easily."

"To-morrow the doctor expects the crisis," said Magdalen, a trifle hurriedly. "He has been so much quieter to-day, so little delirious, that I fancied he might get the turn to-night. But he is so spent, Frank. Sometimes I can't tell whether he is breathing or not."

"Does he not seem to suffer pain?" asked Frank, anxiously.

"Sometimes I fancy it from the expression on his face. If he would only open his eyes and look at me with recognition I could bear it. As it is, I feel it to be fearfully hard."

"What did you say to the old boy, Mrs. Gilruth? Did you explain what is the matter with him?"

"Yes; I said he had caught the fever in his dispensary work, and that he was ill enough to justify my writing to him. I did not put many superfluous words in the letter, Frank, you may be sure."

"And when would he get it?"

"Some time to-day. I told Tom this morning, when I fancied he looked conscious, but he only said he was sorry he had been ploughed, but that he couldn't help it, for he had worked hard. He has been frightfully anxious about this exam., Frank. All these things weighing on his mind are against him, and—and somehow to-night I feel utterly hopeless."

She folded her arms on the mantel and

laid her tired head on them, while two large, slow drops rolled down her wan cheeks. She was worn out, body and mind, and had no power of self-control left. Honest Frank felt his heart full and his eyes wet, but he couldn't utter a word. Sometimes, however, silent sympathy is the best comforter, and presently Magdalen looked up with a faint smile.

"It will never do for the nurse to succumb. Forgive me, Frank; it is a relief sometimes to get it out. I forget how well off I am with so kind a friend as you, and so faithful a little maid as our Crater. She is worth her weight in gold, Frank."

"Ay, is she? The Crater is the product of her environment. I must go to the Infirmary to take my case to-night, but I'll be back before nine o'clock, and then you must go to bed—if you can trust me to watch him."

"Oh, surely," she replied. "But there is no use my going to bed. Could I sleep, do you think?"

"You can rest, at least; you look as if you needed it," Frank replied, and made haste to get his Infirmary work over. He was rather silent and preoccupied in the wards that night, and had little to say in reply to the many inquiries concerning Gilruth's condition.

For the first time for weeks he came across Brebner on the stairs as he was leaving the house. He was about to pass as usual with a curt nod, when Brebner stopped him.

"SHE FOLDED HER ARMS ON THE MANTEL, AND LAID HER TIRED HEAD ON THEM" (*p.* 132).

"What's this I hear about Gilruth, Stormont? Johnny Grant has just been telling me he's likely to croak; not true, I hope?"

"I fear it is," answered Frank, and was rather amazed to behold the face of Brebner flush up quickly, and his manner betray signs of distress.

"Oh, I say, you don't mean it! When did he get so much worse?"

"He's been gradually sinking for a day or two. I don't think myself he'll see the morning."

Brebner leaned against the railing of the stair, and wiped the perspiration from his brow. It was natural these signs of extreme perturbation should surprise Frank, and he regarded him with undisguised curiosity.

"You seem to be rather put out, Brebner. I didn't know you had any special interest in poor old Tom."

"Oh yes; I have always liked the chap," said Brebner, quietly. "How's his wife?"

"Middling. You'd be sorry for her, Brebner, if you saw her, and I only wish I had the waking up of that old brute of a father of his," cried Frank, betrayed into a more than usually candid expression of his opinion. "I'd warm him, I tell you."

"They're not reconciled, then?" queried Brebner, with a furtive, uneasy look, which again surprised Frank not a little.

"No. I wrote myself a week ago, and Mrs. Gilruth has also written, I know; but he's taken no notice. Ugh! I hope he'll smart for it, both in this world and the next."

"Has Tom never seen his father since his marriage?"

"No. He got to hear of it somehow; a distorted version, of course—half lies, as second-hand stories always are—and he's cut Tom off. They've had a struggle, I tell you. When I think what that woman has gone through, Brebner, and of the money that old beast has, I could——; but there's no use talking, it does no good, and I must away."

"They never heard, I suppose, how Dr. Gilruth got to hear about it?" said Brebner.

Frank shook his head, and with a quick good-night ran down the steps and off. Brebner stood still, leaning against the railing of the stair, looking straight before him. Two nurses passed and smiled sweetly on him, but for once his ready tongue was silent.

"Hulloa, Brebner! Seen a ghost, eh?" cried a fellow-student, meeting him presently when he went down, and noting his sickly colour. Brebner never spoke, but passed out into the chill, cold night air, the victim of a remorse which would follow him to the grave. He had been many times uncomfortable thinking of that mean night's work, and hating himself for having uttered the base insinuations which are worse than a direct charge. He felt in his soul that the proud old doctor might have forgiven the imprudent marriage but for the aspersions Brebner had cast on the woman his son had married.

There was not in all the city of Edinburgh

that December night a more unhappy being than Will Brebner. There is no anguish so bitter, so intolerable, as the anguish of remorse. Justly, indeed, it is a scourge to the human soul.

CHAPTER XV.

ALL OVER.

ANOTHER anxious night in the little household—a night of close watching and of many prayers. As Frank Stormont sat by the bedside of his old friend at the midnight hour, his careless heart uplifted itself to Heaven in an earnest petition that a life so dear and precious might be spared; the Crater sobbed herself to sleep with a prayer on her lips; and Magdalen hushed her baby to her breast, and prayed, too, that they might not be left desolate on the face of the earth. These prayers were not answered; at least, not as these human hearts craved. Worn out by many nights of watching and sleepless anxiety, Magdalen had fallen into a heavy, dreamless slumber on the old couch by the kitchen fire, where she was awakened by Frank shortly after three in the morning.

"What is it? He is dying! Oh, I ought not to have left him!" she cried, hurriedly, as she sprang up. "Why did you not wake me sooner, or insist on taking my place? I shall never forgive myself!"

"It could have made no difference. He has never known whether it was you or I beside him," said Frank, with infinite tenderness. "But I fear the end is not far off."

Magdalen heard these words as in a dream. Next moment she was kneeling by her husband's bed. A change, the last sad change of all, was visible on poor Tom's face. He was propped up among his pillows, breathing in a quick but laboured fashion, and his features were sharply outlined, his mouth pinched and grey with the shadow of death. His eyes wandered about somewhat restlessly, but had in their depths no recognition such as the breaking heart of his wife so yearningly craved.

"Oh, Tom—Tom, darling, speak to me, tell me you forgive me for having married you!" she cried; and Frank turned away with a lump in his throat.

Stirred by the anguished note of that loved voice, Tom turned his head and looked at her. She, waiting breathlessly, fancied he was comforted, by the gleam of tenderness on his face. It was the last effort of a sinking consciousness. With a vain endeavour to touch her with the hand from which all strength had gone, poor Tom closed his eyes. Frank came back to the side of the bed, and laid his hand with a protecting tenderness, which moved his whole soul, on the head of the sorrowing woman beside him. So, while they stood, the honest soul of Tom Gilruth, purer than most, after six-and-twenty years of earthly life, winged its way back to the God who gave it.

"He is gone, my dear," said Frank, with a tremble in his voice, and, gently removing the supporting pillows, laid his friend back in the bed.

"Quite dead? You are sure?" said Magdalen, in a calm, quiet voice, as she rose to her feet.

"Quite; there is no life there. It was an easy and painless death; we have that to be thankful for, at least."

"Yes, we have. Will you go and call Katie, and, please, do not come back for a few moments," she said, still quietly. Frank looked at her apprehensively, but she waved him away.

"Only for a moment. I shall be stronger after it. Yes, I am quite brave; do not be afraid."

The wintry smile which flitted momentarily across her wan mouth brought a bursting sob to the honest fellow's lips. He slipped away and left her with her dead.

* * * * * *

About half-past nine o'clock that morning the Crater answered a ring at the door-bell, and to her amazement beheld Brebner standing on the mat. Beholding the eyes of the Crater very red and swollen, Brebner almost feared to put the question he had got up out of bed at an unprecedented hour to ask.

"Nothing has happened to Mr. Gilruth, Blackamoor?" he said, roughly, using the old name through force of habit, though it was no longer in the least applicable to the Crater's case.

"He's deid," she replied, and the tears welled in her eyes afresh.

"Oh, nonsense! it's impossible," he said, and actually began to shake as if with ague.

"At a quarter past three this morning. Oh, it's awfu'!" said the Crater, with her apron to her eyes.

Brebner bit his pale lips till they bled.

"How is Mrs. Gilruth? Is she in bed?" he managed to ask.

"Oh no; she's sitting at the fire in the room wi' the bairn. Wad ye like to come in?"

"Yes, I would. Ask her, will you, if she'll see me? I want it particularly."

The Crater shut the door, and showed him into the sitting-room, and there Magdalen sat with her baby in her arms. She rose in great surprise, but extended her hand cordially—grateful for the kind interest she supposed had prompted the visit.

"I can't shake hands," said Brebner, hoarsely. "You wouldn't offer if you knew. Is Tom really dead?"

Magdalen nodded, motioned him to a chair, and resumed her seat. She felt so very weak and spent it was impossible for her to stand.

"It's awful! I can't believe it," said Brebner; and the violence of his agitation caused a vague wonder to fill the new-made widow's soul. What did it mean? She began to think that perhaps she had, after all, misjudged Brebner, and that he had more feeling than anybody gave him credit for. Great sorrow sometimes makes us very

gentle. Magdalen looked at him with genuine kindliness, and was about to thank him for his sympathy, when he interrupted her with a fierce torrent of words, standing at the table before her—not flinching before the slow wonder in her large, sad eyes.

"You won't look at me so kindly when you hear what a traitor I have been. It was I who told Doctor Gilruth about the marriage, and I made it appear in as bad a light as I could. If it hadn't been for me there might never have been any estrangement. You never saw him—Dr. Gilruth, I mean?"

"No," said Magdalen, with a distinct hardening of her voice and face.

"Because, if you had, of course it would have made all the difference. I made him believe you were not a lady, and worse," said Brebner, keeping nothing back.

Magdalen rose, and took a step back from him, holding her baby tightly, and looking as if she felt it difficult to breathe the same air with a being so contemptible. "May I ask what made you do such a thing? What motive tempted you so to wrong two beings who had never harmed you?"

"You didn't harm me, but you can't have forgotten that I loved you then. I was mad with jealousy that day I came here and heard you were married. I did not take time to think, but went straight to Moffat and told the old gentleman, and I wish I had cut my tongue out before I did it! But I never thought the consequences would be so serious. I've confessed my fault, and I'm

not going to ask to be forgiven. That would be too much. If there is any way I can be punished, though I am punished badly enough at present, I'll submit to it cheerfully; in fact, it would rather be a relief."

Magdalen was silent. What bitterness welled in her soul was known to God alone.

"I cannot conceive," she said, slowly, yet with heaving breast, which betrayed the inward agitation, "I cannot conceive how a human being could do such a contemptible thing. I might forgive you having done it to me; but when I think of him—of his honest, brave, unselfish heart—and think that you knew it, too, and yet treated him so shamefully, I feel it in my heart to hate you."

Brebner kept his head down—abased and ashamed, as he richly deserved to be, before her righteous anger. He could not help feeling through it all what a noble creature she was, how worthy the devotion, the self-sacrifice of any man; and as she stood there, with her baby at her breast, a picture in all the pathos of her motherhood and womanhood, a great passion of remorse, of desire to atone, swept across that self-hardened heart.

"If there is anything I can do," he began, eagerly; but Magdalen raised her hand deprecatingly, and spoke even more quickly, and with heightened colour in her face,—

"There is nothing, except to go away. The sight of you cannot be pleasant to me. But for you my husband might, at least, have had an easier mind during his sickness. In

his delirium his constant talk was of his father; he seldom spoke of me, his wife. Do you think it is easy for me to bear the thought that, but for you, there might have been happier relations between them? Why did you come here to-day to add to my misery? It would have been far better had I never known of your treachery."

"Remorse would give me no peace," said Brebner, gloomily. "I was obliged to confess."

"Remorse and confession come too late," said Magdalen, quite coldly.

"Then you won't forgive me?"

In the passion of her anger Magdalen almost stamped her foot.

"Why should I? You have wrecked two lives out of pure, selfish wickedness. Besides, of what avail is my forgiveness now? The dead, whom you wronged most cruelly, is beyond your poor remorse. Go away, and never let me see your face again. If I can forget you I shall be a happier and a better woman."

The child stirred in her arms, and gave a feeble cry; then, opening wide his eyes, looked up in his mother's face. That look melted her overcharged heart with tenderness, and her face lost its haughty look as she laid it against the soft, baby cheek.

"If I am too hard on you I regret it," she said then, more gently. "I have had much to bear, and I have not yet got accustomed to the idea that I am desolate. If my forgiveness will do you any good, you may take it with you—only go."

Brebner's mobile mouth trembled, and the expression on his face touched Magdalen in spite of herself.

"I have no right to intrude myself a moment longer, but may I—may I see Tom?"

She opened the door, motioned him to follow her, and crossed the little hall. It occurred to her, as she entered the other room, that Tom, even in his death, might have some message for a fellow-creature's soul. Brebner followed into the darkened chamber, and stood in the middle of the floor while she drew up the blind. Then she approached the bed, and with very tender hand folded back the sheet from the face which in life had never turned to her save with tenderness and love. A great and sad change was there. Sometimes death is cruel, and will not leave to us, even in the poor clay, the semblance of the humanity we loved. It was a shock to Brebner, though no stranger to the sight of death, to behold that marble face which bore but little likeness to the man whom many had loved and but few understood. Magdalen turned to him gently, and when she spoke her voice was exceeding soft and low.

"Is it not sad how death changes our dearest for us? That is not my Tom. He is away."

Brebner could not speak—never in all his life had he been so moved; he could have knelt at the feet of Magdalen Gilruth and prayed again for her forgiveness. She understood, and felt more kindly towards him than she had yet done.

"We need not stay—it is painful for us both," she said, gently.

Brebner bent his head, and touched with his lips the living hand and then the dead brow.

"I shall never forgive myself, but I will try to be a better man for his sake," he said, and went his way.

CHAPTER XVI.

MEMORY ALONE.

AS the Crater showed Brebner out, another visitor came up the street —an elderly gentleman, very tall and stately, and of commanding presence.

"Does Mr. Gilruth live here?" he inquired, fixing the Crater with the same eye that had terrified Brebner. They had passed each other unrecognised on the floor of the landing. Brebner, indeed, was not in a fit state to recognise anybody.

"Come in," the Crater said, mechanically, and the old gentleman was ushered into the sitting-room, to which Magdalen had not yet returned. Too confused to ask his name, the Crater announced his presence to her mistress, who was dressing the baby at the moment, and allowed him to wait nearly a quarter of an hour. When she did enter the room, the impatient old gentleman turned to her with a look of extreme surprise. A lady, every inch of her, he was compelled to admit, as he noted the slender, graceful curves of the figure; the close-fitting black gown so admirably

suited the fine outline of the face, which appeared white against the absolute sombreness of her attire. Although no name had been given, she recognised him at once, but betrayed nothing in her manner as she greeted him by a distant inclination of her head. There was a moment of awkwardness, or nervous silence, which he at last broke, speaking in a gruff, forbidding voice, which, however, did not make Magdalen wince. All things seemed but trifles in the face of her great sorrow.

"You have kept me waiting a long time, madam. I am Dr. Gilruth."

"Yes; I ask pardon for my delay. I was so busy when my maid brought your name. I came as quickly as I could," she replied, calmly. That cool, haughty manner nettled Dr. Gilruth, and he showed it in his next words.

"I—I presume you are my son's wife?" he said, with a slight curl of his lip.

Magdalen fixed her large eyes full on his face, and answered in a low, clear voice,—

"Sir, I am your son's widow."

"My God! You don't mean to say he is dead?"

"He died this morning, sir, at a quarter past three," Magdalen answered, in the same still, passionless voice. "If you will step this way, you can see him."

She was out of the room before the old gentleman could detain her. As he followed her out into the lobby, a child's cry broke the dreary stillness of the house.

"What's that? Is there a child?" he asked, sharply.

Magdalen turned, with her hand on the door of the death-chamber, and Dr. Gilruth did not like the smile on her lips. But she never spoke a word. She left the door open, and pulled up the blind once more, so that the sunshine filled all the room. Then she folded back the sheet from Tom's face, and left the room, leaving the father alone with his dead.

She went hurriedly back to the kitchen, where the Crater was sitting at the hearth with the baby on her knee.

"Katie, I want to go out. I don't want to see the gentleman again who has come. He is the master's father. If he asks for me again, just tell him I have gone out; and if Mr. Stormont is up, he can perhaps speak to him."

"Mr. Stormont is up, ma'am. I was getting his breakfast when baby woke up."

"Oh, well, tell him I had to go out. I can't wait."

She spoke with nervous haste, and, wrapping a cloak about her, she went hurriedly downstairs. It was fortunate that the baby fell asleep again after being warmed and fed, for the Crater had a great deal on her mind. She took in Mr. Stormont's breakfast, and gave him her mistress's message, which visibly excited him. He opened his door a little, in order to hear when the old gentleman moved. But it was a long time before he heard anything. The Crater was getting uneasy likewise, when

at last she heard the bedroom door open, and a heavy foot go towards the sitting-room. Then the bell rang.

"Ask your mistress to come here, girl," he said, gruffly.

"She's gone out, sir; but there's Mr. Stormont'll speak to you," the Crater answered, and disappeared with trepidation, for there was something very awful in the old gentleman's eye. Frank came into the room without hesitation. He hoped an opportunity had come for him to speak his mind.

"Good-morning, sir. Your name is Stormont—the Stormont I have heard my son speak of, I presume? Do you live here?"

"Yes, I live here."

Frank did not know what to make of the old gentleman. If he had any feelings, or had received a shock that morning, there was no visible sign.

"Mrs. Gilruth, it appears, has gone out. Perhaps you can give me some details. How long has my son been ill?"

"Nearly a month."

"Ah! Typhoid fever, caught in his dispensary work, your letter said. Perforation of the bowel supervened. You have been his college companion all along, I understand, and, as you have been living in the house, you may know something of their circumstances. My son must have been continuing his University career. How was it done?"

"Done? It was done by self-sacrifice and unremitting toil on the part of his wife,

sir, who is a lady among a thousand. But for her, Tom would have given up, and tried to earn money for himself; but she wouldn't let him. She's kept boarders—and—and, I believe, taken in sewing to make money, and I—I don't know what kind of a father you call yourself, sir," cried Frank, in fearless indignation. But the curious thing was that the old gentleman, with all his pride, did not appear to resent this plain speaking.

"And there's a baby, too; and she looks like a lady. I've been a fool," said he, to himself. "Where do you suppose she has gone?"

"Oh, out to wander about till you go away. It's not to be expected that she can regard you with lively satisfaction. Poor Tom——!"

But the words choked in the lad's throat, and for a moment there was a constrained silence.

"Just so," said the old gentleman, drily. "Well, I'm obliged to you, Mr. Stormont, and I'll sit here till Mrs. Gilruth returns. Good-morning."

Frank felt himself dismissed, and retired—not knowing what to make of Martin Gilruth, M.D. How often they had joked about such a meeting—not dreaming of the dreary circumstances under which it would take place! Within the hour, Magdalen returned to the house.

"He's here yet," whispered the Crater, as she admitted her. "He's waitin' for you in the room."

There was a high, bright colour on

Magdalen's cheeks, and with a swift gesture she swept past the Crater and entered the room where Tom's father sat.

"Well, sir," she said, curtly and coldly, "I understand you wish to see me."

"I do. We must be friends, Mrs. Tom."

The colour mounted yet higher in Magdalen's proud face, but she never spoke. She was, indeed, entirely taken by surprise. Martin Gilruth stood directly in front of her —a tall, imposing figure, with his handsome face and beautiful white hair; an ideal old gentleman, so far as outward appearance was concerned.

"I am a very proud and a very passionate old man, Mrs. Tom, and I have made a fool of myself," he said, looking at her steadily. "I deserve the very hardest, of course, that can be said of me, and if it will relieve you to say it, pray do so now. I have never in my life got such a shock as to-day, and I don't think I'll ever get the better of it. I was very hard upon the lad always, and I know now that I loved him better than my own soul."

Magdalen made a distinctly deprecating gesture, and her lip took a slight curl, and she could not help it. She did not believe a word he was saying, and he saw it.

"I have made the grandest mistake of my life, Mrs. Tom, and it was about you," he continued, still looking at her steadily. "If I had known——"

"That I was such as would not quite disgrace you," supplemented Magdalen, in keenest scorn, "you might have been more

"WE WILL MOURN HIM TOGETHER, MY DEAR" (*p.* 155).

lenient to your son. I am obliged for the compliment, Doctor Gilruth."

He shook his head slightly, and she saw a kind of tremor about his mouth.

"Your pride equals mine, Mrs. Tom. One of us must give in. I ask you here, as by my dead boy, to forgive me. I have made the grand mistake of my life, and I have to suffer for it. Woman, do you think it is nothing to me to see him lying there dead? You think yours is a mighty grief. Let me tell you it is feeble compared to mine. I have never had an idol which has not been shivered before me; I have never built a temple for love or ambition which has not been cast down in ruins. There is a curse upon me and mine. The Almighty pursues me with His vengeance, and this is the last stroke. He is welcome to take my life too. It is valueless in my eyes."

Magdalen was awed by the fierceness of the passion, which shook the old man as the wind-storm shakes the wintry boughs. For the first time a strange, sweet touch of compassion relieved the gloom of her soul. He turned to her once more after a minute's painful silence, and he was conscious that her expression had changed.

"You will forgive me; I see it in your eyes. You have the true womanly eyes. They are softer than the smile of heaven. We will take the boy home and bury him beside his mother, and we can mourn him together. Ay, ay, poor lad. He is better off where he is to-day. We can mourn him together."

He sat down before the table and buried his face in his hands. Magdalen stood still, looking at him, conscious of the dictates of her heart, yet rebelliously bidding them be still.

But the deep, bursting sob which broke the stillness, the upheaving of a strong, proud, passionate nature, swept all her harder thoughts away. She knelt by his side and leaned her head on his arm, and her voice had never, in her tenderest moments, been sweeter than then.

"Hush, hush! I cannot bear to see you so grieved. It will be as you say. If there is anything to forgive, I forgive it. He bore no ill-will. He spoke of you incessantly while he was ill, and always with affection. He—he seemed to long to see you. We were hasty, but it was my fault. I ought to have thought of something else than my own selfish happiness. Oh! believe me, I have often regretted that selfishness, for Tom's sake. Believe me, and forgive me."

Had any one told Magdalen, an hour ago, she would make such an appeal, she would have laughed them to scorn. But there was something in that proud figure, in the pathos of its age and sorrow, like a great tree bent by the force of many storms, which broke her pride completely.

"My poor girl! my poor, dear girl!"

Martin Gilruth, who had shown no tenderness to womankind for many years, raised the kneeling figure, and clasped it close to his heart, his white hair mingling with the rich brown locks with which Tom had so

often played. And they were very silent, both feeling awed and solemn, as if the spirit of him who had gone away had come back to bless that sad yet happy hour.

"We will mourn him together, my dear," said the old man, brokenly; and Magdalen laid her arm about his neck and kissed him on the lips.

So Tom sleeps on the green braes of Gilmanscleugh, and there are three hearts in the old house among the elms to whom that green grave is a precious place. Even little Tom has learned to hush his childish prattle, and to tread lightly on that sacred sod. "Gran'pa" is so much to him, so indulgent, so tender always, that it will not be wondered that he cannot miss the father he never knew. The young widow, in whom the old doctor has a pride and a tenderness he makes no attempt to hide, has not forgotten the intensity of being held by that brief, bright, chequered year of her married life. Its memory is cherished by her most sacredly; there is not a page of it she would wish to forget. Frank Stormont remembers his friend likewise, and strives to model his life after that earnest ideal. The influence of Tom's blameless life and sad death has travelled across the ocean, to the southern city where Will Brebner, his wild oats sown and continually regretted, is the stay and comfort of his parents' heart. He writes sometimes to Magdalen, whom he is permitted to call his friend.

Little Tom has learned to take a lively interest in the American mail, which brings

him frequent gifts of ingenious and wonderful toys, such as cannot be purchased in the united emporiums of Gilmanscleugh.

There is yet another who sincerely mourns poor Tom. In the heart of the Crater memory is faithful, and finds expression in untiring devotion to his widow and his child. It is no marvel that Magdalen should regard as a true friend that faithful soul. Memory has forged a link between these two women which only death will break.

THE END.

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